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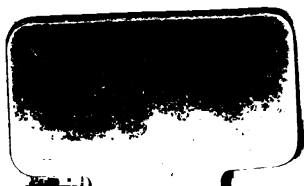
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**A SIMPLE COMMENTARY ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT.**

A SIMPLE COMMENTARY

ON THE NEW TESTAMENT:

INTENDED FOR FAMILY READING AND FOR THE
USE OF COTTAGERS :

CONTAINING
THE LIFE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,
IN A HARMONY OF THE FOUR GOSPELS.

BY LADY WAKE.



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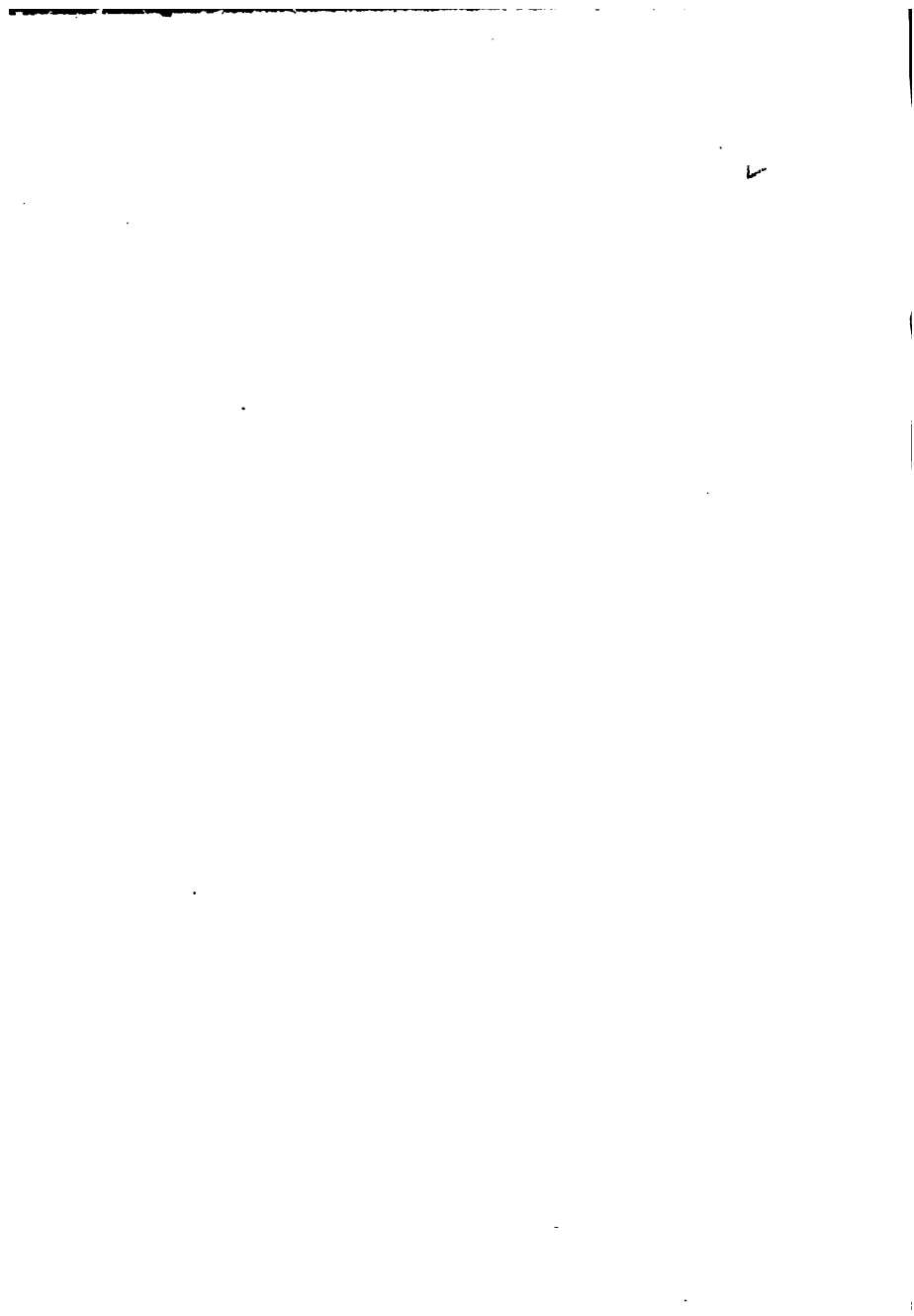
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BIBLE READINGS.

I.

MATT. VIII. 1—4. MARK I. 40—45. LUKE V. 12—16.

THERE was, and there still is, in the land of the East, a dreadful disease called Leprosy. It is very different from any thing we ever see in this country. No medicine, no skill of man has ever been known to cure it. It has been well called a living death, for while the spirit of life is in the leper's body, his flesh rots and decays away as though he were already in his grave. He moves about, and thinks and feels as other men, but he is a terror to himself, and a terror to every one who beholds him.

To this day, in those countries where the leprosy of the East is known, there is always some place given up to the unfortunate creatures who have it, and none who enter that place are ever allowed to leave it.

All cases of leprosy are not bad alike, and the taint is often long in a man's blood before it shows itself to any great degree; but one of the miseries of the disease is this, that it passes on from the parent to the child; so that the unhappy leper has to mourn, not only for himself, but for his children.

When God gave laws to his people Israel, He gave them also signs by which they might know his will; and He made choice

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of leprosy to be the outward sign of the ruin sin has brought upon the body and soul of man.

Had there been no sin, there would have been no death ; and the awful change that passes upon the dead is the very sign and seal of sin. None can look upon it without the solemn warning—" See what sin hath done ! " And therefore leprosy, that " living death," was an awful and fit sign of the state of those who give themselves up to open sin. Loathsome and horrible, it shewed what sin is in the sight of God, and what it should be in the sight of man—the terrible disease of the soul, that by degrees eats into the very core of life, bringing on, inch by inch, that death which is for ever.

It is true that no sickness can befall us unless God permits ; but we read in the books of the Old Testament, that He often sent leprosy as a direct punishment to those who rebelled against him ; and in all cases, by his laws, the leper was cast out from among his fellow-men, as unclean, unfit to dwell among the people of God. He might not come to offer sacrifice in the temple—he might not even enter any city. He was commanded to dwell alone—to wear the same mourning for himself that men wore for the dead. Bare-headed, with his clothes rent, the lower part of his face covered, sick, suffering, and miserable, not a friend might come near him, for whoever touched the leper was himself, by God's law, unclean. He lived alone, and if he heard the voice or footsteps of some traveller passing by, he was commanded to lift up his voice and cry aloud, " Unclean, unclean ! " that all might be warned to turn aside. What a terrible picture of the woes of unforgiven sin ! Let the bold sinner think that whatever he may seem to men, this is his real state before God.

But the leper could be healed. All men knew that the power of God, and nothing else, could heal him. He who sent the disease, He alone could take it away ; and in the book of Leviticus we read the affecting service that God commanded, and

the sacrifice that was to be offered for the cleansing of the leper ; before he could be given back to his home and to all the happiness of returning health.

This service and this sacrifice, by the shedding of blood and the washing of water, solemnly shewed forth, before the time, that by the Saviour only even the pardoned sinner can be saved.

From all we have read we may guess with what feelings the lonely leper must have looked from afar on the busy crowds he dared not join.

There was one who had heard the words of the Lord Jesus, and had, perhaps, seen the wonderful things He had done. Hidden by some rock on the mountains of Galilee, he was, perhaps, nearer to his fellow-men than they supposed, and the words of the Saviour brought hope where there had been none before.

MATTHEW V. 4. *"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."*

Must not these words of kindness have fallen like soft music on the leper's soul ? Who was a mourner like him ? Cast out from among men, the very picture and sign of sin ! Yet he heard the words—

MATTHEW VII. 7. *"Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find."*

Perhaps they were spoken to him as well as to others, for it was said, *every one* that asketh, receiveth ; and, outcast as he was, had not God made him also ? His own father had loved him when he was a little child, though both were evil,—why should he not then believe that his Father, which is in heaven, would look on him with pity ? And who was it that the leper heard thus speak ? One who, in the awful day of judgment, (Matt. vii. 21—23.) was to be that Lord who should open or shut the doors of heaven to welcome or refuse those who would enter

therein. He had power, then, as well as kindness ; and hope sprung up in the leper's soul.

It is written, that—

MATTHEW viii. 1—3. “ *When Jesus was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, (and fell down on his face before him, and kneeling, said unto him,) Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand and touched him, saying, I will ; be thou clean.*”

The Saviour and the leper ! Though in a crowd, they were alone ; for not a man amongst that crowd but must have started back from the defiling touch even of his garment, when suddenly he stood among them. And in that cleared space the leper knelt, the Saviour's hand upon his brow, while distinct and solemn came the words—“ I will ; be thou clean.” All men shrunk from the leper's touch, but THIS MAN laid his hand upon him, “ And immediately his leprosy departed from him.” (Mark i. 42.)

Surely Jesus had a right to the authority with which He had just spoken to the people on the mountain, and they need not now be “ astonished at his doctrine,” (Matt. vii. 28, 29.) when they saw his deeds.

He well might teach them a purity of heart, of which the Scribes and Pharisees had never dreamt, for here, before their eyes, one touch of his hand sent away that foulest sign of Satan's power, leprosy, the very type and seal of sin.

He stood among them in the form of man, but He was God ; himself the source of life, and from his touch life passed into the decaying body,—and leprosy, “ the living death,” was gone.

And who may guess the feelings of the leper ? Leprous now no more !

Years perhaps had passed since he had felt the kindly touch

of a human hand. All had shrunk affrighted from him ; but Jesus had no fear. The Leper felt his touch, and knew that he was cleansed.

MARK i. 44. *“ And Jesus saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man, but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.”* (Matthew and Luke.)

The Lord Jesus would not have a word spoken to any man, till the cleansed leper had obeyed the command given by God through Moses. The sacrifice and the offering must be made, and the priests, whose duty it was in such a case to declare the cure, must see that the man was really cleansed. When they heard that he who had been not only a leper, but “ full of leprosy,” (Luke v. 12.) was cleansed by the simple word, “ I will ” and one touch of Jesus’ hand, it should indeed have been a testimony or a witness to them that He was no common man, but the Lord from heaven. They knew well that this terrible disease had never been reached by the skill of man, and that if ever cured, it was by God himself.

The sacrifice appointed was two birds ; of which one was killed, and the other dipped in the blood of its companion, and then suffered to escape. When, two years after this, the Lord Jesus was slain upon the cross, having taught the people that He laid down his life for them that they might escape the punishment of sin, perhaps the meaning of the sacrifice the leper had been commanded to offer for his cleansing might become clear to his mind. He might then see in the slain bird the picture of the bleeding Saviour, and in the affrighted bird escaping to its home, his own saved soul, saved from the death of sin, of which his leprosy had been the emblem. We know not certainly whether his mind was ever so enlightened, but I think we may fairly believe that the kind Saviour who had cleansed his body,

would surely cleanse his soul ; and we read that his gratitude for what Jesus had done, was such that—

MARK i. 45. "*He went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places : and they came to him from every quarter.*"

LUKE v. 15. "*And great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities.*"

What brought them there ? Was it not that they had need of the things He had done, and of the words He had spoken ? And shall not this teach us that we should do all we can that others may hear the word of God in every place, in every land, that great multitudes may be continually coming to Christ to hear and to be healed of their infirmities.

Does not the history of the leper tell us never to keep back what we know of the Saviour's goodness ? Some one may hear, who hides within his heart a sense of sin that makes him lonely and miserable, even though he dwells among his friends. The words of Christ may bring hope, perhaps he may seek him for himself, and so find pardon and peace.

And oh, if there is one who reads or hears these lines, whose soul is bowed down within him by the heavy grief of separation from God—one who feels the taint of sin, like leprosy, poison all the joy of life—let that unhappy one remember the leper and hasten to carry his griefs to the Saviour's feet. Kneeling, let him say, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

Still, though now unseen, will the Holy Jesus, moved with compassion, stretch forth his hand to help, and say, "I will ; be thou clean."

Prayer.

O God, we were born with the taint of the leprosy of sin upon our souls, but there is "a fountain opened for our uncleanness," and sinful souls when washed by thee, lose all their guilty stains. We were brought to thee in baptism, and sprinkled with pure water, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, in sign that our sins are washed away, and that God the Saviour says to each one who comes to him, "I will; be thou clean." Blessed Lord, let not this our baptism be a sign only, but let our souls daily be purified and renewed, for unless we are wholly cleansed, we are not fit to be called thine. We cannot dwell in thy presence, for without holiness none can enter the kingdom of heaven.

Sin is my plague and my grief, it taints my whole nature, and though I have been numbered among thy people, and though thy blood has been shed for me, still does sin, the sickness of my soul, appear within me. Oh, my Saviour, I bless thee that I have the leper's cure, that I have heard thy gracious words, "Ask, and ye shall receive." I ask thy Holy Spirit to give me newness of life, and to grant to me that, since thou hast suffered death in my stead, my soul, washed in thy blood from all sin, may escape as a bird from the snare of the fowler. Amen.

II.

MATT. IX. 1—6. MARK II. 1, 2. LUKE V. 17—26.

It is not easy to follow the life of the Lord Jesus from day to day, or to be quite sure how the things He did and said follow each other, for the four Evangelists who wrote the history of the time He spent on earth, were more anxious to tell what

He did and said, than to mark the particular times. And so the best way is to compare the four Gospels, and to take one distinct history from them *all*.

We have just heard, that after the Lord Jesus had cleansed the leper, the people came out to him in crowds into the desert, to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. It is then written that—

LUKE v. 16. “*He withdrew himself into the wilderness and prayed.*”

We shall again and again see this ; that between the times of much business, the Saviour left the company of men and went away to be alone and to pray. Let us remember that He lived for our example as well as died for our salvation.

Some time after this, we find that He returned to the city.

MARK ii. 1, 2. “*And again He entered into Capernaum, after some days ; and it was noised that He was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, in-somuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door.*”

LUKE v. 17. “*And there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem.*”

The fame of Jesus was now so great that people came from every part to see him and to hear him. No doubt the arrival of the leper at the temple with his sacrifices, and the offering for his cleansing, and the wonderful story of his cure, made a great stir among the priests and the doctors, or teachers of the law.

Perhaps it was this that had brought them to Capernaum. Jerusalem was a great way off, and if they came on purpose, it was well worth their while. And the people crowded so to hear Jesus, that there was not room for them even at the door.

LUKE V. 17—19. “ *And the power of the Lord was present to heal them. And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy : and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the house-top, and let him down through the tiling, with his couch, into the midst before Jesus.*”

The people stood in such crowds about the doors of the house, that to come nigh Jesus was impossible, but this sick man and his friends were too earnest to reach him, for any difficulty to turn them back. The houses in the East are built with flat roofs on purpose that the people may enjoy the cool of the morning and of the evening on the house-top. There is a way down into the inside, and there are also stairs outside. Now it was up these stairs that the friends of the sick man carried him in his bed, and opening the roof wide enough, they in this way let him down into the midst before Jesus.

No doubt the grave and learned doctors of the law would be surprised, and perhaps even angry when our Lord's discourse was broken short by this strange sight. And when the bed, slowly lowered from the roof above their heads, laid at their feet the poor paralytic, they would not look upon him very kindly. But Jesus was ever the same, full of tender pity, and of earnest desire to do the work for which He had come into the world, to destroy the works of the devil, by healing every sickness, and pardoning every sin. He stopped at once, and looking on the sick man, and on the strange manner in which he had been brought before him, “He saw their faith,” a faith that trusted in him as the only one who could help them in their need.* But He saw more than this, He saw that a greater grief than sickness bowed down the soul of the sick

* Trench on the Miracles, p. 201.

man, that the weight and sense of sin was a greater burthen than his bodily sickness and suffering. The poor man had not yet spoken. 'He had not yet asked for any thing, save indeed by the dumb earnest effort to come near to Jesus; and all he dared to ask even in that, or at least all that his friends who brought him there, dared to hope for, was, that his body might be healed.' * Yet no doubt he felt in himself that he had deserved to suffer; perhaps he was cast down by knowing that his manner of life had brought upon him this his sickness, which by taking away the use of his limbs, seemed to take away every power of usefulness; for the grievous ill of paralysis seldom comes upon a young or even middle-aged man without some such cause.† The Lord Jesus saw the hidden grief,

MATTHEW ix. 2. "*And said unto him, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee.*" (See Luke v. 20.)

Oh what a load must have passed from the sick man's soul! Not only were the natural powers of his limbs restored, but a higher and more holy power of life came upon him. Nothing

* Trench on the Miracles, p. 201.

† It would be well if men would remember how the Almighty God has *wedded sin to suffering*. They forget, perhaps they do not always know, that vice brings disease, and that in this way God punishes, even in this life, those who boldly sin against his laws. Too often is this very disease of paralysis brought on by intemperance.

It is not long since, in a party of thoughtless young men, one took a bet with his companions that he would drink a certain quantity before they parted. He did so, but the next morning when the money was to be paid, the unhappy man was found with his face twisted to one side, and nearly speechless. He had won his bet, but he had lost his health for ever.

And when this has been so, the feeling of the guilt and shame, will sometimes keep back the repentant soul even from that pitying Saviour who holds out his arms to receive him. "How can I expect that God will accept me now," said a sufferer in the prime of life laid low by paralysis, "I would not serve Him when I could, and now that I am as a crushed worm, I cannot—I have neither mind nor body to offer Him."

keeps back the soul from God like the fear which sin brings upon us, it is like a paralysis of the mind. But now this man could be of good cheer, his sins were forgiven him, and he was able to seek Christ as the Saviour of his soul, as well as the **healer** of his body. (Luke v. 21.)

MARK II. 6—12. *“But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, He said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.”*

LUKE V. 26. *“And they were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to-day.”*

Had Jesus been only man, it would have been blasphemy for him to pretend that He had the power, which belongs to God alone, of forgiving sin. The Scribes and Pharisees sitting there were glad at any thing that could excuse *them to themselves* for not even believing him to be a good man. We shall see from first to last, that their aim was to make the people believe that the Lord Jesus was a deceiver, and they looked at all He did and said with the wish to think so themselves. But they were left without excuse. The next words of Jesus shewed them that their most secret thoughts were open to his sight. They had not spoken, but He told them at once what they

were saying in their hearts. It is written that, "He perceived *in his Spirit* that they so reasoned in themselves," and by these words we plainly see, that in his human nature dwelt the nature of God, who alone can read "the thoughts and intents of the heart." (1 Sam. xvi. 7. Jer. xvii. 10. Heb. iv. 12.)

Why reason ye thus? said the Lord. Does it seem easy *to say* thy sins be forgiven thee? I will give the proof that it is not a mere saying.

At his word, disease, which sin brought into the world, fled away, and the forgiven man rose up in that health of body and of mind, which had man never sinned he never would have lost. "And he departed to his own house, glorifying God."

And now, before we pass on to another subject, let us take a moment to think of what we have just read. It is true we cannot keep away illness, but if those who are still in health but knew how much the fever of the body is made worse by the fever of the mind, and how the sense of sin adds to the pain and danger of disease, they would make haste to seek for pardon before the fear of death come upon them. They would go to Christ before they are laid on the bed of sickness; and though we cannot see him now, still He would say to them, "Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee." Earnestly I would persuade you in the words of one who died young, but full of peace with God in Christ, 'Make friends with the Saviour *now*, while you are well and happy; and when He calls you away you will not be frightened. He will seem to you not as a stranger, but as a long-known friend.'

Before leaving this miracle of our blessed Lord, I would wish to point out to you how much the efforts of the friends of the sick man were blessed. They were earnest to bring him to Christ, and He, seeing their faith, gave them the thing they sought for. He gave them more, for He not only made their sick friend whole, but He pardoned his sins, so that he was not only able to rise up and walk to his house, but also to glorify

God. May we from this example take courage and do all we can to bring those we love to Christ. The friends of the paralytic man carried him in his bed through the crowds of people, and up the stairs to the top of the house. They broke through the roof—they carefully let down his bed, for they would not be stopped by any difficulty—they would not rest till they had seen him safely laid at the feet of the Saviour.

Christian friends, Christian parents, learn from them a lesson of faith and love. Bring those you love to the feet of Christ. Try *all means*. Let nothing stop you. Rest not till His blessing is upon you and them, till His voice has whispered pardon and peace. We cannot indeed hear or see Him now with our bodily senses, but His voice still speaks in the heart, and He Himself, before He departed, said to His apostles, “Lo ! I am with you always, even to the end of the world.” And this promise holds good to every member of the Christian Church, of which the apostles were the beginning.

Prayer.

Blessed Lord, have pity upon us ! for sin, like a palsy, hath taken away all our powers of mind and of body, so that we are not able to serve thee as we should, or even as we would. But, blessed be thy name, thy power is present with us to heal us. Oh, say unto each of us, “Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee ;” and let the sense of pardon and of peace with thee be within us like a new life, that we may have power to glorify thee in every thought, in every word, and in every deed. Heal our souls before the sickness of the body comes upon us, that in the hour of death we may be of good cheer, and feel assured that the pains of death are but so many friends bringing us to the Saviour’s feet ; and that thou wilt shortly send us, with thy pardon and blessing, to our heavenly home, rejoicing and glorifying God who hath given us salvation through his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

III.

MATT. IX. 9. MARK II. 13, 14. LUKE V. 27, 28.

MARK II. 13. "*And Jesus went forth again by the sea-side ; and all the multitude resorted (went) unto him, and He taught them.*"

The people flocked eagerly to hear him. We are not told what he said to them at this time, but we are told something *He did*, which was a striking lesson to them all, that now, if they would be his disciples, they were to put from them every bitter feeling against particular persons and parties. All, from this time, were to be judged of by one rule, and it was this : Would they hear the word of Christ and obey it ? All who did this were his ; what they had been before, was to be no more thought of. Do you remember what you have read of the publicans,*—that they were hated by *all* the Jews, rich and poor, because they gathered the taxes for the Romans ? They were hated so greatly that no Jew would have any thing to do with a publican. He was looked upon as a traitor, because he joined himself with the enemies of his own people, and a cheat, because they believed that he always made himself rich at their expence, taking more from them than he had any right to do. And this was but too true of most of them. All this Jesus knew, and knowing it,

Verse 14. "*As He passed by, He saw (one of these very men, a publican, named) Levi, (whose name was also Matthew,) the son of Alphæus, sitting at the receipt of custom, (the place where the taxes were gathered,) and He said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.*" (See Luke v. 27.)

* Vol. I., p. 76.

The word of Christ was with power. It reached the heart of Matthew at once. The love of gain could not hold him back, it was gone in a moment. A new life, new hopes, new wishes were before him. He arose at once, and followed Christ,—not for a time only, but for ever. He became one of the chosen few who were to be his witnesses to the end of the world. He now left all, that he might learn from the Lord Jesus those holy lessons of religion which he was to spend his life in teaching; and, “being dead, he yet speaketh,” for this publican is the writer of the first gospel in the New Testament. It bears his name, and every time we cast our eyes upon that title in our Bibles, “the gospel of Saint Matthew,” we are put in mind of the wondrous power of the word of Christ, which changes the sinner into the saint. As the darkness flies before the beams of the sun, so the love of money fled from the mind of the publican; and the light of religion shone in upon him. His desire for gain before must have been great, or he could not for the sake of being rich, have chosen a trade which made him hated and despised by every body; but now, the whole man was changed, the true riches were set before him. To gain them, he must still be content to be hated and despised by those of his countrymen who refused to receive and obey the word of Jesus; but now the loss was as nothing, for the gain was life eternal.

The change of the publican into an Apostle, was a greater miracle than the cleansing of the leper, or the cure of the man who had the palsy; but, blessed be God, it is a miracle we see every day among ourselves. I need not speak of John Newton,*

* The Rev. John Newton, Vicar of Olney, and afterwards Rector of St. Mary's, Woolnoth, London.

The true history of his life is given in few words by himself, in the Epitaph he wrote for his own tomb—

John Newton, Clerk, once an Infidel and a Libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the Faith he had long laboured to destroy, &c.

changed by the power of God from a hardened and wilful sinner into the devoted servant of his will, the bearer of his word to thousands. Nor need I speak of others who, like him, have, at the call of Christ, changed the open service of the Devil for the service of God. I would rather speak of what happens every day, of the change from the love of the world, in whatever shape we happen to love it, to the love of God in Christ, which *His word* does bring to all who are willing to hear and to obey.

And we who now read this word, how stand our hearts before God? What fills them? The desire of gain? It is sure to disappoint you. Money will not come as surely as you expect and wish it; or if it comes, it goes again. You cannot keep it long, no man can take it with him to the grave, even if he has been careful to keep it through his life. Perhaps it is not *money* that you care for, but all the different things you think money can give you. Tell me this, can money give you health or peace of mind? You know it cannot, and if you have not health, and if you have not peace of mind, what matters it what else you have, you are not, you cannot be happy—unless you have found rest in Christ's love to you—then indeed, even if you are sickly, even if you are miserable in all other ways, you will be happy in him. Oh be wise in time. The Lord Jesus calls to you *now*. In every page of the Bible He says, "Arise and follow me." Let it be said of you with truth, that when you have heard the word of Christ, you "left all, (that kept you back from God) rose up and followed him." But remember, Matthew was called to be an apostle. This was the line of work the Lord Jesus chose for him, but you have to follow Him in the every-day duties of your life, and you *are* following Him if you remember to obey Him in them all.

God appoints who shall teach, and who shall be taught, and both alike are precious in his sight.

IV.

MATT. IX. 11—13. MARK II. 15—17. LUKE V. 29—32.

When Matthew (whose name was also Levi) was thus called by the Lord Jesus, he wished to show him all the respect he could, and was no doubt anxious that those who had been his friends and companions, should hear from Jesus *what* the true riches were, for the sake of which it was worth-while to be scorned by men. Therefore he

LUKE V 29. "*Made him a great feast in his own house : and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them.*"

MATTHEW IX. 11—13. "*And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners ? But when Jesus heard that, He said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice : for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*"

These men asked, in great surprise, how it was that Jesus, who gave such lessons of holiness, could thus sit down with publicans and sinners, as if He were their friend and companion ? But Jesus, in reply, put them in mind of the visits of the physician to the sick. Would they be surprised, if the sick man sent for the doctor to come and cure him, that the doctor immediately went ? No, they would not. Why then were they surprised that *He* who taught them that sin was the sickness of the soul, should gladly go to the sinner to take away his sin ? The scribes and pharisees read to the people the words of the prophets, but they did not themselves un-

derstand them, or they would have seen that Jesus, in what He was now doing, was carrying out the plans of God, his Father. He bade them go and learn what was meant by the word of God in the prophet Hosea, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." (Hosea vi. 6.)

If men had not been sinners needing mercy, they would have needed no Saviour. Had *they* been righteous, He would have remained in his kingdom of heaven; but because they were sinners He came to save them and to call them to repentance. How glad, and yet how humble, must the poor publicans have felt when they heard these words of the Lord Jesus. The scribes and pharisees despised them, and would have thought it a shame even to speak with them, but He whose words and whose life were so holy that none could find one fault against him, He who called himself the Son of God, and who did wonders that none but God could do, sat down among them as their friend. And the reason He gave for doing this was, *their sin*, that He might "call them to repentance."

His power had changed the heart of Matthew, and we cannot doubt, that some among the many who had followed him to Matthew's house, and sat with him there to hear him, were brought to see that their true riches lay in the Gospel He taught them.

The answer of Jesus to the pharisees, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," shall to the end of the world speak peace to many a wounded heart. When the sinner awakens to a sense of his sin, then comes the fearful thought, that he is too bad to be forgiven. He feels his unworthiness; he feels that he is not fit for the kingdom of heaven, and the anguish of his heart, instead of bringing him to God for pardon, drives him, like Adam, to hide himself from Him. (Gen. iii. 7—10. It is not unbelief, it is terror caused by the sense of sin. He knows that God *can* forgive him, *but* again

and again rises the terrible question, How can I expect that He *will*. I have sinned so often against Him, I deserve to be cast off by Him for ever. Then the terrible *for ever* rises up before him in its awful truth, and the poor soul is so tossed with fear, that *hope* has no power to shine through the darkness of his mind. The kind voice of the Saviour at last is heard. The Lord Jesus speaks to him in the words we have read. He tells him that it is because *of him*, and of those like him, that He came into the world. Had he been righteous, he would not have needed a Saviour. It is because his sin is as great as he feels it to be, (and for that very reason,) that Jesus has pity upon him, and will give him pardon and peace in leading him to repentance. He is sick *from* sin, and he is sick *of* sin, *therefore* Christ will heal him. He is a sinner, *therefore* Christ has come to call him to repentance. Is there one in this case, who now reads these pages, let him believe that the physician of his soul is come to him, and that from this time, if he will, the sickness of his soul will be taken away from him, and life everlasting will be given him, for Christ is come to call him to a true repentance.

Prayer.

Oh! my Saviour, Physician of my soul, in pity look upon me. Heal me and I shall live. Sad are the pains of the body and hard to bear, but they are nothing to the grief of sin, when once the heart and conscience are awakened to know how evil and how bitter a thing it is to have wilfully sinned against so good a God. O grant me pardon *now*, grant me repentance unto life, that when the pains of death shall come upon me, they shall find my soul freed from the disease of sin. Blessed be thy name, my Saviour; thou art not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance, or I had never heard thy voice, for I am a sinner from my birth. I am weary and heavy-laden with my sin. O take away the burthen, and give health

to my soul, that I may serve thee with every power of the mind and of the body thou hast given me. Amen.

V.

MATT. IX. 16, 17. MARK II. 21, 22. LUKE. V. 36—39.

MARK II. 18—20. “ *And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast : and they come (to Jesus) and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not ? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bride-chamber fast while the bridegroom is with them ? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.*”

The religion of the Pharisees, as you have heard before, was chiefly an outward show. They fasted often, and many of them did so, putting on a sad countenance, that they might be seen of men. (Matt. vi. 16) They could not believe in the holiness of the Lord Jesus, when they saw Him willing to sit down with His disciples to the feast that had been made in honour of Him in the house of Matthew the publican. It was true that the answer Jesus had given them, when they found fault with Him for going into the house of a publican at all, could not be spoken against ; but why did He sit down to the *feast* he had made ? Did not He and his disciples fast ? The whole manner of life and of teaching of the Lord Jesus was so different from their's, that they could not understand Him ; nor shall we, while, like the Pharisees, we think well of ourselves, and are only willing to take as much of the religion of Jesus as suits our own ideas. And the disciples of John came also to

Him with the same question : " Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but thy disciples fast not ? " They indeed had cause to mourn. Their Master was in prison, his life hanging, as it were, by a thread, for he had offended a tyrant king and his wicked wife by his bold reproofs, and each day they feared would be his last. They had cause to be of a sad countenance. And they knew not yet the glad tidings of the gospel of peace which Jesus had brought down from heaven. They only knew the repentance for sin their master John had taught them. They had cause to fast much and often. But with the disciples of Jesus it was not so. He was with them. This was the time of their joy. The days would soon come when they must mourn and fast and weep. A time of sorrow was at hand. Their Lord would be taken from them. Fear and pains and grief would fall upon them, then would they fast. But these days were not yet.

Was it likely that the guests at a wedding should be mournful ? They were the friends of the Bridegroom, and while with him they must rejoice and be glad. If indeed he were taken away, then all their feelings would be changed, and their gladness would be turned into grief. So was it, so would it be with the disciples of the Lord. And Christ is the Bridegroom of his Church, and his Church is, all those who *love* him and obey him. Let us be *first sure* that we are of those, and then with glad and thankful hearts we may enjoy the days of sun-bright happiness He sometimes gives. They will not last too long. He knows his children's need, and the days will come when they *must* fast. Sorrow, and sickness, and death enter every dwelling, then do we forget our daily food, and our eyes can take no rest. We suffer in the sufferings of those we love, and in our own. But as it was with the disciples of old, so is it with the children of God now. They were dear to their Lord in their sorrow at the end of his ministry, as they had been at the beginning ; and when our time of mourning comes, it is but that we are nearer the end.

The same Lord who smiled upon our days of joy, clasps us closer to his bosom in our time of grief; and though we see him not, he is surely carrying us, "through much tribulation," to that happy land where no tears are ever shed, for sorrow is passed away with sin for ever. (Rev. vii. 9—17.)

The Lord Jesus did more than answer the question put to him by the disciples of John and the Pharisees. He shewed them that the religion he was come to teach and to give needed no help to make it perfect. It was complete in itself.

The old law given to the Jews was, like the garment worn by their High Priest, full of types and figures. (Exodus xxxix. 1—31; xl. 12—15.) It had served its time—its use was at an end.

The gospel of peace which was now to take its place, was a robe of righteousness that needed nothing to be added unto it. To all who received him the Saviour gave it, pure, white, and stainless; they need nothing more. To join the two together would be worse than useless; both would be spoiled.

LUKE v. 36. *"And therefore he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, (that is, if they do) then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old."*

Our Lord wished to shew them that the trials his Christian disciples would be called to meet were very great, without adding to them the burthens of the Jewish law. He knew their weakness, and he would spare them all needless trial. Therefore He said—

Verses 37, 38. *"And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved."*

They would not themselves put "new wine into old (lea-

thern*) bottles ;” for they knew that if they did, “the new wine” would “burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles” would “perish” and so both would be destroyed. Neither would he require too much in these early days from his Christian converts. Neither could he expect that those men, to whom He was teaching the better things of God’s new covenant with his people, would have any taste for the teaching of the Pharisees, as no man would choose bad or new wine when he could get that which was old and good.

LUKE v. 39. “*No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new : for he saith, The old is better.*”

Thus Jesus taught them in parables, or in wise sayings, which were full of deep meaning.

VI.

MARK i. 21, 22. “*And they (Jesus and his disciples) went into Capernaum : and straightway on the sabbath-day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. And they (the people) were astonished at his doctrine : for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.*”

Here is the great difference between the word of man, and the word of God. Even the wisest and the best of men can only guide us right when they themselves are guided by the word of God. As soon as they are tempted, even in the least degree, to leave God’s word and to follow their own ideas, they go astray themselves, and lead others wrong. This the Scribes and Pharisees had done. They had, for their guide, the written

* In most countries where wine is made, instead of putting it into bottles as we do, it is put into skins, which, when they are old, are apt to burst from the fermentation of new wine.

In all places in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testament, where bottles of wine are spoken of, these skins are meant. 1 Sam. xxv. 18.

word of the Old Testament. They had all God's holy law, but by little and little they had added many things to it, and by explaining away its simple meaning, they had taken many things from it, till, as Christ himself declared, they had, by their traditions, or added sayings, "made the commandment of God of none effect."* But the Lord Jesus was come by the authority of his word to bring back the truth, and to shed a clearer light by his gospel upon God's kingdom. He was come to shew men how they might be saved, and He spoke with authority, for it was *his own word* he declared unto them.

MARK i. 23—26. "*And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit ; and he cried out, saying, Let us alone ; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth ? art thou come to destroy us ? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not.*" (Luke iv. 35.)

The evil spirit could no longer hurt the man. He had heard the word of Christ, and was forced to obey.

We have read before of our Lord's casting out devils, but this is the first time that in his history we have one distinct case brought before us, and as we shall soon find that he performed wonderful cures over many that were possessed with devils, it will be well for us here to take a little time to consider what was this strange and awful thing which was called possession by the Devil. That we may understand it, let us go back to the time when, in the beginning, God told Satan that, because he had tempted Eve, the first woman, to sin against Him, "the seed of the woman" should bruise his head, and that it should destroy his power.† (Gen. iii. 15.)

Satan, that evil spirit, the enemy of God and man, had been

* Matt. xv. 6.

† See Vol. I., p. 4.

ever on the watch, and he now knew the time was come. The seed of the woman, so long promised, had at last been born, and Satan raged more furiously. All who are obliged to be abroad early, before day-break, know that the darkest time of the night is just before the dawn, and so it was in the night of the world. At the time of the birth of the Lord Jesus, "thick darkness covered the people, and the nations sat in the shadow of death," for the knowledge that had been given them of the true God had been so changed, that in all nations, except the Jews, it had been so much corrupted as to mislead rather than guide the people. Men indeed were looking for the Messiah, but only as an earthly prince, who was to please their vanity and make their pride greater, by giving them the victory over all nations. In the spiritual life of man there was a feeling of want, and most of them were hopeless of help. In despair of any good, they rushed into every sort of sensual pleasure, that they might forget themselves and their miseries. 'The whole time was the hour and power of darkness—of a darkness which then was thickest, immediately before the dawn of the new day of Christian hope.'* And Satan, the prince of darkness, made the most of his time. His power then seems to have been at its greatest. He always has, from the beginning, and he always will, to the end, make slaves of those who willingly give way to his temptations. Those who at first allow the spirit of evil to lead them on, from the right way, will soon find that they are driven by him into sins which they dared not at first have thought of. This is the history of Satan's power at all times; but at *this time*, of which we speak, just before, and for some years after the Lord Jesus Christ was born, the Devil and his angels seem to have had more open power over man than they had before, or than they have had since. They entered into the bodies of those unhappy persons who had given way to their temptations, cruelly lording it over them even

* Trench.

against their will, forcing them to do and to say many things they would not. This was not disease only. It is true that the bodies of these miserable creatures had generally some disease, which most likely had been brought on by the very sins to which the devil had tempted them, and these sins had been the beginning of their sad condition. Nor was it madness, for, in the list of the sufferers who were brought to Christ to be healed, we find that those who were possessed with devils, and those who were lunatic, or mad, are separately named, the one being distinguished from the other. Matt. iv. 24.

We know assuredly that it was not madness, for the word of God always speaks of it as of "possession by the devil;" and God is truth. It is useless to say that it is spoken of in this way because men commonly thought that such persons were possessed with the devil, though they were not really so, and it was needless to contradict them; for if we believe that Jesus was the Son of God, we cannot believe that he would speak untruly and act deceitfully. And this he would have done had he solemnly addressed himself to evil spirits, giving them his commands, and seeming to listen to their answer, when He knew no evil spirits were there. This is impossible.*

Thus the words "possessed with the devil" are simply true, and Satan had the awful power of entering into the bodies of those men who had yielded to his temptations, and of forcing them to do and to speak as he pleased. But it is quite clear that they were not his willing slaves. They tried at times to get free from this terrible master. They longed to be saved from his power, and they seem to have had a hope that they might be saved by Christ the Lord. We have just read that a man who had a spirit of an unclean devil, came to the synagogue where Christ taught. But the devil that was in him, filled with terror at the actual presence of the seed of the woman, the long-promised deliverer, forced the unhappy man to

* See Trench on the Miracles, p. 151, 152.

cry out, "Let us alone, what have we to do with thee, Jesus of Nazareth? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God!" We see, in those words, the devil's fear of Christ the Lord, and that he knew well both who He was, and what He had come to do.

The Lord Jesus in answer, spoke not to the man but to the devil that was in the man,—“Hold thy peace, and come out of him.” The evil spirit was forced to obey. The seed of the woman had begun to bruise his head, to destroy his power; but still he might bruise His *heel*; for Christ as man feels for all men as for His brothers, and suffers in their sufferings. So the unclean spirit when forced to leave the man, first did him all the harm he could, “And when he had torn him, and thrown him in the midst, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him.” It is added to this, “and hurt him not.” His power was ended: he could not and did not hurt him more. When that dreadful convulsion was over, which, as it were, *tore* the man, and threw him down, he was calm, and at peace in body and in mind.

LUKE iv. 36. “*They were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.*”

They might well be amazed, for it was clear that this Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Lord of all power and might. But let us turn from this deed of Jesus to ourselves—to the power of Satan over us, and to the power of Jesus to deliver us from him.

Blessed be God, since his holy Son died and rose again for our salvation, the power of Satan has been greatly broken. He is not now allowed to rage so furiously. But still he is always the same, always on the watch to tempt to sin; and, even when he cannot get the better, he can and does still cause much suffering. From him come those evil thoughts which often bring

pain and grief, even to those who with all their hearts serve God. It is well to know this. It is well to understand that these bad thoughts come *not from ourselves*, but from Satan, and therefore are not *our sin*, but *his*. They are those "fiery darts of the wicked" (Eph. vi. 16.) against which, St. Paul tells us we should lift up "the shield of faith,"* which is able to *quench* them, that is, to put them out altogether. Such wicked thoughts darting into a mind that hates them, are not sin: they are from the devil himself, and Christ *has conquered* him; he shall "do us no hurt." It is only when we make wicked thoughts welcome, and keep them in our minds, till they become our own thoughts, that they are sin. Then indeed, like a fiery dart, which is *not quenched*, but on the contrary, is laid among fuel, one wicked thought in this way received and cherished will set fire to the whole soul, and cause a wicked life.

Prayer.

O God, my Saviour, stand thou by me, that the Evil One may have no power to hurt me. Give me grace to put on the whole armour of God, that in the time of temptation I may be able to resist the tempter. Guard me from evil thoughts, help me to throw them from me, that they may not become *my sin* through my yielding to them. Make me afraid of the beginnings of wickedness, and keep me ever mindful, that to give way in the least to the temptations of sin is to invite the devil to take possession of my heart.

Holy God, thou knowest how often I have done this. It is by thy goodness and mercy only that I am still able to struggle against the power of the Evil One; leave, oh leave me not alone, but still support and comfort me, for the sake of thy dear Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

* By "the shield of faith" is clearly meant our belief in God's power to help and save us.—On this subject, see note in Olshausen on the Gospels, Vol. I., p. 305.

VII.

MATT. VIII. 14—17. MARK I. 29—34. LUKE IV. 38.

In, or near the city of Capernaum, dwelt two of the disciples whom the Lord Jesus had called from their fisher's boat to be with him wherever He went. Simon, to whom He had given the name of Peter, or the Rock, and Andrew his brother. They lived together, and with them lived the mother of Simon Peter's wife. At this time she was taken ill of a fever, and it is written, that one day when the service of the synagogue was over, Jesus entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a great fever, and anon they tell him of her, and besought him for her. And He came and stood over her, and rebuked the fever, and immediately the fever left her, and He took her by the hand and lifted her up, and she arose and ministered unto them.

In these two verses is put together all that the three Evangelists, St. Matthew, St. Mark and St. Luke, have written of this kind act of power, done by our Lord in the house of his two apostles, Peter and Andrew. He found the family in deep distress; He brought back in a moment gladness and peace. He *rebuked* the fever, and as the servant obeys the commands of his master, so did the fever obey His voice, and immediately it was gone; the sick woman was able to rise up from her bed, and to attend as usual to the wants and comforts of the family. How many, when they read this, will be apt to say within themselves, 'Oh that the Lord Jesus were still here to rebuke all fevers, to send away all sickness.' He is still here. He still performs the miracles He did then, only we see him not. Each time that a sick person recovers, and is raised from his

bed to the usual duties of his life, it is because the Lord of all power and might has rebuked his sickness, and taken him by the hand, and lifted him up. If this were not so, if it were not the Lord's doing, then either sick men would always die, or the doctors would always be able to make them well. But it is only as the Lord wills it to be, and the means we use must obey his commands.

All the miracles that Jesus wrought while He was on earth, He is working now, and every day. The only difference is this, that while He was on earth, He, to show to *man's eyes*, that He was God, did in a moment, and by a word, what He is more slowly doing in every part of the world.* The sick do not always recover. Great fevers often destroy life, and though the Lord Jesus raised up Peter's wife's mother, and healed *many* sick in the city of Capernaum, there were thousands of sick people in the other parts of the land of Israel, and of the entire world; and, some of them lived, and some of them died, even as they do now, but their life and their death was by his command, and each one who was raised from the bed of sickness was raised as much by the hand of the Lord Jesus as was the mother-in-law of Peter, "when He stood over her, and took her by the hand, and lifted her up."

MARK i. 32, 33. *"And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door."*

None but those who have lived in hot countries can know the relief of the sun-set—the delights of the cool evening hour. While the day lasts, even the beasts and the birds hide themselves in the shade, and all men, if they can, remain at home with doors and windows closed to keep out the scorching heat. The sun sets, and all is changed, each house is thrown

* See Vol. I. the water turned into wine, p. 110.

open ; the air is filled with happy voices—men, women, and children come forth to enjoy the blessed coolness that follows the burning day. But Jesus did not come forth—He could not, for “At even when the sun did set,” the door of the house in which He was, was beset by the sick and the miserable. They crowded there, insomuch that it is said, “all the city was gathered together at the door.”

Their need was greater than the need of the fresh evening breeze which Jesus must have felt like other men.* The sick and suffering were ill able to bear the heat of the middle-day, and those who brought them had waited till it was past ; besides, it was the Sabbath, and they may have thought it was not right to disturb the holy quiet of the day by such an unseemly crowd ; but now the Sabbath was ended, for the sun was set,† and “all the city was gathered together at the door.”

LUKE iv. 40, 41. “*And he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak : for they knew that he was Christ.*”

He laid his hands on the sick and healed them, but He cast out the evil spirits with his word, (Matt. viii. 16.) by his command, and the devils were forced to obey. They were forced to leave the bodies of those unhappy men, in which they had taken up their dwelling-place, and in their terror they cried out that they knew him to be the Son of God. O holy Jesus, how great is thy love and thy might, by which thou hast restrained this terrible power of Satan ! St. Matthew, when he ends the history of this fatiguing day, writes—

MATTHEW viii. 17. “*That it might be fulfilled which was*

* See Vol. I., p. 137.

† The Jews reckoned their days from sunset to sunset.

spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."

Kindly and patiently through every day of his ministry He bore the heavy burthen. He had left his bright home in the heavens, and He had come to scenes of misery. The glad voices of the adoring angels were changed for the jarring sounds of pain and strife. The complaining of the sick, the bursts of fury of those who were possessed with devils, had taken the place of the joyful hymns of spirits in glory, but the Saviour turned not away. "In all their affliction He was afflicted," and most truly was He "acquainted with grief." (Isaiah liii. 3.) And thus that day was ended. And it is written that—

Mark i. 35. *"In the (next) morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place (in the desert) and there prayed."*

We may not dare to follow him even in thought. We may not pry into that solemn secret communion of God the Father with God the Son, but we, who "love him because He first loved us," may rejoice, in thought, to behold him afar off, alone in the dreary stillness of that hour, his Divine nature cheered and refreshed by his converse with God; his human body strengthened by the cool early breeze. Men, with their sins and their miseries, lay sleeping in the towns and villages along the shores of the sea of Galilee, but Christ was alone in that desert place, praying. And it was a glorious temple, for most beautiful are the rocks and shores of Galilee. When the rising sun drew the mists from the vallies, up the mountain sides, and the rippling waves of the sea began to sparkle in his beams, still the Saviour was there, alone, and still He prayed. But with the day returned the labours of the work He had come to do—to destroy the power of Satan, to give back this fair

world to the kingdom of God, who made it. He must not remain alone.

MARK I. 36—38. “*And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee. And He said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also : for therefore came I forth.*”

LUKE IV. 42—44. “*And the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that He should not depart from them. And He said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for therefore am I sent.*”

MARK I. 39. “*And He (departed and) preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee.*” * And Galilee was at that time full of cities and villages, thickly crowded with people.

Prayer.

O blessed Saviour, Holy Jesus, how shall we adore thee ; how shall we love thee, cold, weak and sinful as we are ? We can but cry unto thee, Lord ! have pity upon us. Thou didst take upon thyself the burthen of our miseries and of our sins, take upon thyself this burthen also, that we cannot worship thee as we ought ; pray thou for us.

Thou hast returned to the bosom of thy Father, but we are still toiling and suffering here. Still we need thy power to save. Sickness, and sorrow, and the malice of the devil, still weigh heavily upon us ; but it is our comfort to know that, even as thou didst rise up to pray before it was day, and when

* The Jewish historian Josephus, who lived immediately after the time of Christ, describes Galilee as full of flourishing towns and cities, almost beyond any other part of the world. He states that, though not quite sixty miles long and seventy broad, there were in it 204 cities and villages, and at least three million six hundred thousand people !

men were sleeping wast praying for them, so now thou art making intercession for us. The night is far spent, and the day is at hand. O grant to us that we may be children of the light, that we may put from us the works of darkness, and may rejoice at thy coming. Amen.

VIII.

It was in the end of the first year of our Lord's ministry upon earth, that He went through all the towns and villages of Galilee, preaching everywhere the Gospel, or good news, of the kingdom of God. He then went up to Jerusalem to keep the solemn feast of the Jews, the Passover; and this marks the beginning of the second year of his ministry. When He had been there before, He had taken to himself authority and power, and had cleansed the temple of God, driving out the buyers and sellers, who had turned its sacred courts into a market-place. (John ii.) This act had fixed upon him the attention of the chief priests and pharisees. They remembered with anger the answers He had made them when they asked what sign He could show to them as a warrant for taking such authority upon himself. He had answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The meaning of this saying was quite dark to them, but they remembered it against him with spite and anger. It was not understood by any one, till his body, the true temple of God, after being, as it were, destroyed by death, and lying three days in the grave, was raised again by his own power when He returned to his Father's throne.

It was at the time of the first passover, after his baptism in the river Jordan by John, when God, by a voice from heaven, had declared him to be his well-beloved Son, that Jesus had cleansed the temple, and had made this answer to the Jewish

priests. Then "many had believed in his name when they saw the miracles which He did," but the chief people had always been against him. He was not the kind of Messiah they desired to have, and all they had heard of him, during the year He had passed in Galilee, made their feelings against him more bitter. Some of them had been there to hear him, and had seen the wonderful works He had done. (Luke v. 17.) But their report only filled the Chief Priests with anxiety, and with a proud and jealous fear. They soon had cause, for the Lord Jesus began this second year of his ministry, by publicly showing that while he was come to *fulfil* the law, he was also come to do away with their traditions, that is, with those sayings of their own, by which they had so changed many of God's laws as to make evil that which God had made good. From the beginning they had been commanded by God to "keep holy the Sabbath-day, and to do on it no manner of work." This command they had, during a long time, often disobeyed, and for this, and for their continual rebellion against God, they had been punished. Jerusalem had been destroyed, and they had been carried away prisoners to a far-off land. But after their punishment was ended, and God had brought them back again to their own country, the sinful pride of the Jews, which had always made them a rebellious people, shewed itself in a new way. Proud of being called the people of God, they hated and despised all other nations, and added many things to those laws which kept them separate from others. They made it "an unlawful thing for a man that was a Jew to keep company or come unto one of another nation." (Acts x. 28.) Instead of being, as they often had been before, unwilling to keep holy the Sabbath-day, they now made it a real slavery, a complete bondage.

Their teachers had made laws for the keeping the Sabbath, which, as it were, tied the people hand and foot, and prevented them even from doing good on the Sabbath-day. It seems as

if it were the nature of man to love the rules he makes for himself; and while the Jews hated Christ because he showed them the pure service of God, which would set them free from many an irksome rule and custom, they loved the yoke they placed upon their own necks, and prided themselves in it.

The Lord Jesus, by his first act in Jerusalem, when He had this second time returned there, gave them a lesson *how* they might keep holy the Sabbath-day according to God's commands, but not according to the traditions, or added sayings, of the teachers of the law. He sought a place where He knew He should find many sufferers. The Sabbath-day brought no rest to the bodily pains of the diseased, and they needed help on the Sabbath as on other days.

JOHN V. 2—4. *"There is at Jerusalem by the sheep-market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, (or, the house of mercy,) having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had."*

To this place our Saviour went. He was sure to find there many sufferers, for it was believed that an angel, at certain times, went down into the pool, and, troubling the waters, gave them a healing power from God, and the first diseased person who then bathed in them was immediately made whole.

It is not written that the angel was seen, as in other places, where the words are expressly, that an "angel appeared" unto Mary, and Zacharias, and Joseph, and others; therefore we may suppose that in this pool, his presence was only *felt* by the blessing he brought from God, when from time to time He gave a healing power to the waters. And we do not now know

how often the unseen angels may be bringing their messages of love when we little think it.

Bethesda was indeed "the house of mercy," for five porches had been built round the pool, that under their shadow, the poor creatures who waited there might be sheltered from the summer-sun and the winter-storm. One only, could enter the pool at a time. When the bubbling of the water showed the hour was come, how great must have been the anxiety among all these sufferers ! Each sought to be that happy one. Jesus stood amongst them. It was the Sabbath-day, and He had come there to teach the whole nation that He was Lord of the Sabbath, and by his deeds and his words to sweep away all the rubbish of man's invention. He had come there to give back to the Sabbath its first purity, when God commanded that it should be remembered "to keep it holy," but not to make it a bondage and a snare. This was the cause for which He came to the pool of Bethesda, and we shall find that his words flowed afterwards in a healing stream, better than all its waters ; but the first thing we mark in what He did, speaks to our hearts of the tenderness of his loving-kindness. It was needful by a miracle to cure one of the diseased objects that lay around him, that He might shew to all men, that, on the Sabbath, as on other days, Christ the Son performed his deeds of mercy even as God the Father carried on his works of Providence ; but He did not choose the object of his kindness and his power at random. He looked round on the many sufferers who lay within the porches. All could see whether they were maimed or blind, whether they were young or old, whether they were sad as well as sick ; but the Saviour saw much more than this. The story of each sufferer's life was to him written as on their foreheads, and one among them He knew was without a friend.

Verse 5. *"A certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years."*

For eight and thirty years had this poor man borne his griefs alone. He had not one who would stretch out a hand to help him, and so long had he been used to neglect, that though he still came to Bethesda, he seems almost to have lost all hope of being ever able to reach the pool in time to gain a cure. But suddenly hope returned ; a kind voice spoke to him. Jesus ever " to the friendless proves a friend.

JOHN v. 6—9. "*When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole ? The impotent man answered Him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool ; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked : and on the same day was the Sabbath.*"

It was done, and in a moment—Jesus spoke the word, and power came back to the powerless limbs ; the man stood upright, and in his first surprise thought but of obeying the command he had received ; he took up his bed, and walked. But where was He whose word had in a moment thus ended the weary thirty and eight years, and changed the sick man's life of suffering into joy and health ? He was gone. The Lord Jesus departed at the very time when the man obeyed his command and arose, so that when he looked around he could not find Him, and " wist not who it was " that had healed him. This miracle, done on the Sabbath-day, was the beginning of the new lessons the Saviour had to give on the right observance of the Sabbath, and He immediately left the place, perhaps on purpose, that the Jews might shew their feelings without being irritated by His presence. Their wonder at the sudden cure did not lead them, as it might have done, to the truth, that the power which had healed the sick man in a moment might be

greater than that which they believed an angel gave to the waters.

JOHN V. 10—13. "*The Jews therefore said unto the man that was cured, It is the Sabbath-day :—it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed. He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk ? And he that was healed wist not who it was : for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place.*"

They were too full of prejudice, and of proud self-will, to see any thing but this, *their* opinions were not followed, Jesus did not keep the Sabbath according to *their* rule, and thus they missed the good they might have gained.

Let it not be so with us. There may be outward forms and observances dear to us, and time and custom may have made them sacred to our feelings ; but let not these have power to draw our thoughts from higher things, from deeper truths. It is on the Saviour Himself we must fix our reverent attention, careful to learn what He would teach. Our Church is to us a Bethesda, a haven of mercy, and God has given it a healing power, and we do well to crowd into its porches, to wait long in faith and patience for the promised blessing, but let us, all the time, look up from our Bethesda to God, from whom the blessing comes ; let us watch lest we miss the Saviour, lest amidst the jarring sounds of men's opinions we may fail to hear Him, when to each one of us He says " Wilt thou be made whole ? " And there is much in the history of this miracle that should strengthen our faith, and fill us with comfort. How long this poor man had waited for a cure ! Day after day, year after year, he had dragged his powerless limbs to Bethesda the haven of mercy. He had seen others come there, like himself, faint and weary, and he had seen them depart in gladness of

spirit, and in soundness of body. They had found health in the healing waters. He too believed in their power to heal, but he could not take to himself the cure, and he had not a friend to help him to it. His case seemed hopeless. It would have been hopeless but for Christ the Lord, the Saviour of the sinner, the Friend of the friendless, and among all the crowd he was chosen, that by a word he might be healed. Let none then lose hope. Let all who feel their need, in faith and patience, seek for God's saving power in His own appointed way, in His house of mercy, in His holy Sacraments, in believing prayer. The Saviour's eye is upon them ; and though they may wait long, He will not forget them. He will Himself give the blessing they seek, and as the powerless man by his persevering in coming to Bethesda, at last found a sudden cure in Christ, so will each one who perseveres in all these things, find that the Saviour has at last come to him, and given him power to arise and serve Him with gladness of heart. Nor need the grieving sinner, who has not one friend to speak to him a word of encouragement, lose heart for that. As the Lord Jesus looked round upon a crowd of sufferers and singled out one who had none to help him, so will His pitying love seek him out, and "to the friendless prove a friend."

Prayer.

Bow down thine ear, O Lord, and hear us, for we are poor and helpless. Preserve thou our souls, for we are thine ; save thy servants that put their trust in thee.

We have been early brought to thy Bethesda, Lord, and the waters of baptism have been sprinkled over our childhood. We have been taught to seek thee in thine appointed means ; O let us not fail to find thee, the Saviour. Give us humble, earnest hearts, that no self-will of ours, no vain disputes of men may keep us back from thee, for thou only canst heal the disease of sin, thou only canst give *power* to the sinner to

arise from his helpless state, and serve thee with the glad service of soul and body. Let us not be discouraged though we wait long, but give us grace to persevere in all thine appointed means. Friend of the friendless, look with thy tender pity upon those who have none on earth to help them. One word of thine is worth all the words that men can speak ; shew them thy salvation, Lord, comfort them, that they may be able to lift up their souls to Thee, for Thou, Lord, art good and gracious, and of great mercy unto all them that call upon thee.

Teach us thy way, O Lord, and we will walk in thy truth ; knit our hearts unto thee, that we may fear thy name. And now, O Lord, our Redeemer, give ear unto these our prayers, and ponder the voice of our humble desires, for thou art God alone.* Amen.

IX.

We have read that the Lord Jesus left the pool of Bethesda immediately after He had spoken the word which gave back to the impotent man the use of his limbs. He had gone so suddenly, that the man himself did not know who it was that had healed him, but this he knew, that it was the power of God alone that could have thus raised him up, therefore he immediately went to the temple of God, there, as we may hope, to offer up his thanks and praise for the great mercy that had been shewn him. The eye of the Saviour was still upon him. He had healed his body ; but there was much more to do. All sickness, all suffering is a type of sin, and is caused by sin, though not always by the sin of the sufferer ; but there seems to have been something particular in the case of this man. We are led to think so, by the solemn warning given him by the Saviour, who took care to find him in the temple.

* From the 86th Psalm.

JOHN v. 14. “ *Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole : sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*”

Do not these words seem to say, that the thirty-and-eight years of pain and weakness that He had endured, had been brought upon him by sins long past, by deeds done, all those years ago ? * ‘ This infirmity had found him a youth, it had left him an old man.’ † His youth ! how had it been spent ? Had he given the flower of his days to the service of his God ? or had he not rather given the strength of his young life to vice, and so withered his manhood before it was ripe ? Oh ! if the boy did but know, if he would but believe the years of grief that follow a youth of vice, he would sooner take a stinging serpent to his bosom, because its colours were bright, than he would give himself up to the pleasures of sin. And how short are these pleasures ! They are gone even in the enjoyment of them ; but long is the weariness of spirit, and the weakness of body, that follows upon them, and this cannot be prevented, for vice *must* bring misery. God has so ordered it, and no man can hinder it. I remember one who was born the heir of all that wealth and station could give : in person, in manners, in temper, and in talent, he was such as men most admire : he was the only son of his family, of which he was the pride and the hope. But in early youth he gave himself up to the pleasures of vice, and all this fair promise was blasted. With ruined health, and weakened mind, a victim to nervous terrors, when alone, he trembled where there was no cause for fear ; when with others he plunged into a forced and reckless gaiety. He strove to forget in drinking, the ruin he had brought on all his prospects. In many ways, by many voices, the Saviour seemed to say to him, “ Wilt thou be made whole ? ” but instead of seeking for a cure, he turned a deaf ear to every

* Scott’s Commentary.

† Trench on the Miracles.

warning, or perhaps it would be more true to say, he listened for a moment, then, unable to bear the pain of remorse, he madly rushed into every vice in hopes that he might forget. A few more years were given. At last, in early manhood, he sunk into the grave, a grief and a shame to his friends, an object of pity to some, of solemn warning to all. And many who read this must remember some such sad example, for in every station of life, alas! there are always some who blight the promise of their youth by giving themselves up to early vice, and the end is always the same, for a dissipated youth never can blossom into the strong and useful man. And to woman the ruin is yet quicker and more certain, for her body and her nerves are more delicate, her mind feels more keenly. If she gives herself in her early years to vice, woe unto her, for there is not any thing in all nature so miserable, so lost to hope, as a bad woman. But some are early warned; they find, while it is yet time, the madness of their choice, and seeking for help from God, who is never sought in vain, they have strength given them to break through their evil habits, to leave all sinful companions; soul and body they are saved: they rise from their fallen state and follow Christ. Let all the young then listen to the words of the Lord Jesus, when to the man He had just raised from thirty-and-eight years of weakness and of pain, He said, "Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee."

A worse thing! What an awful insight do these words of Christ give of the judgments of God against sin! Here is a solemn warning against something yet more terrible than a whole life given over to bodily suffering. And what is life compared to eternity? What were thirty-and-eight years of pain and weakness, of disappointed hope, of friendless loneliness, when compared to the awful state of the lost soul, "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched?" Whatever be the meaning of these awful words, they surely tell of horrors, com-

pared to which, a *life* of misery is but dust in the balance. Let each of us then ponder them in our hearts, and, when God in his mercy, has raised us up from any trouble, let us remember that the voice of his Son calls upon us to greater holiness of life, "lest a worse thing come unto us."

When the man knew that He who healed him was Jesus of Nazareth, he made haste to tell it to those Jews who had found fault with him for carrying his bed, thinking, no doubt, that when they knew it was that Jesus who was already so famous among the people, they would be satisfied that he had done right in taking up his bed at his command.

JOHN v. 15. "*The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus which had made him whole.*"

Did this new wonder, this new proof that the power of God dwelt in Jesus, convince them that they would do well to listen to him? Did they see in the man before them a witness to the truth, that Jesus was indeed, what He claimed to be, the Son of God, who had power on earth to forgive sins, and to heal all manner of diseases by a word? (Matt. iii. 17. John iv. 25, 26, 42. Luke v. 24.)

They saw nothing of all this. They were blinded by their prejudices, and their self-will. They only saw that Jesus did not keep to their traditions, since He had dared to make the sick man whole on the Sabbath day, and *therefore* for the *very reason* that should have taught them the truth, they went the further in the mad struggle against that kingdom of God upon earth, which Jesus was come to set up among men.

Verse 16. "*And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because He had done these things on the sabbath-day.*"

Let this, their mad blindness, teach us to be afraid of obstinately maintaining our own opinions in matters belonging to

religion, lest we, like the Jews, be found to have set up the prejudices of men in the stead of God's simple truth. Some have carried this great mistake so far, that when they cannot find what they want in Scripture, even now they build themselves up upon the traditions of men. This must always be dangerous, for men are, and ever have been, easily deceived by the strength of their own opinions. It is the inspired word of God only, the Scriptures themselves, that can be a safe guide. Had the Jews followed them they would have known the Saviour, as one by one each prophecy and promise was fulfilled by him.

Let us see how gently the Lord Jesus reasons with them, giving us a lesson by his example against the angry impatience men are apt to feel against the religious errors of their fellow men. *We* may be mistaken; *we* may call that error, which indeed is truth; but the Son of God could make no mistake: yet gently, mildly, he reasons with the obstinate Jews. They were angry with him because He had made a man whole on the Sabbath-day; they should rather have considered what it was this deed of His taught them. They did not quarrel with the healing power given by God to the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath-day. Had they not seen the sun rise that Sabbath-morn? Did they not themselves find that God gave them all their daily blessings on the Sabbath as on other days? Did not the buds of spring swell, and the fruits of summer and autumn ripen on the Sabbaths as on the week-days? And what did all this teach them? Was it not plain that God's works of mercy were never stopped, and that when He commanded man to cease from labour on the Sabbath-day, it was that his body might rest, and his soul, set free from worldly cares, might the better seek to fit itself for the Divine life for which God had made it? The Jews were all agreed that every work of mercy was done by God. They knew these works of mercy were carried on through every Sabbath, and that the whole race of man would be ruined if God

stopped those works of mercy on the Sabbath. Why then did not this teach them that He who had healed the sick upon the Sabbath, worked with God and as God, that He was in truth what He said, "the Son of God."

JOHN V. 17. "*Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*"

The Jews at once understood the meaning of his words, but their pride and their anger only became more furious.

Verse 18. "*Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.*"

Prayer.

O God, save us from prejudice and pride. Save us from that angry spirit that turns even the word of God into a cause of strife, instead of taking it into our hearts as the gospel of peace and good will to men. O let us leave all vain disputes, and earnestly seek grace from thee, that we may see in every new mercy a call to greater holiness of life. Blessed Lord, forgive the sins of our youth. Blot them out, O our Saviour, that they may no more be named against us, for we cannot stand in judgment one moment before thee if they are remembered against us. We trust in thy promise that all our sins shall be forgiven us, for the sake of all thou hast done and suffered for us; and Oh, we pray thee, look in pitying love upon the young. Leave them not to be cheated into misery by the lying promises of Satan. Open their eyes that they may see the great truth that there is no happiness but in serving God, that what are called the pleasures of sin are but poisons, sweet for one short moment, but bringing surely torture and death. Thou, O God, art our Father, give to us the hearts of children, that we

may trust to thee to provide for the happiness and the pleasures of thine own, for Jesus Christ's sake, our Lord. Amen.

X.

We have just read that the Jews sought the death of the Lord Jesus, because "He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God." It is thought that the chief men among them met together at this time, and that Jesus was called before them to answer to the charge of blasphemy, which, by the law of Moses, was punished with death. (Lev. xxiv. 16.)

Wilfully to speak against God was blasphemy. All words spoken with the intention of taking away from the honour and glory of God were blasphemy; and, if any *man* said that he was himself equal with God, it certainly would have been very dreadful blasphemy. Jesus therefore stood accused before the priests and rulers of the Jews of a great crime. We shall now read his defence. We shall see him claim the power of God as the Son of God.

JOHN V. 19 *"Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, (that is as man only) but what he seeth the Father do : for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise."*

The meaning of this is plain. Had Jesus been a man only, as they who accused him were men, He could not by his own power have worked miracles; (John xiv. 10, 11,) but being the true, the real Son of God, He was of one mind, one will, and one power with God his Father, and nothing He did was, or could be, apart from him. In his human body dwelt the God-head, (Heb. i. 1—3,) and it was his part to carry out on earth

the purposes of his Father, and to work with him. Jesus went on to declare to the men who questioned him, and who might well be filled with awe and fear as they listened to his words, that the holy bond of love which was between himself and his Father, who was the great God, made their will and knowledge one.

JOHN v. 20. "*For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth.*"

So should they see yet greater wonders than they had seen. The mind of the Father would soon be more clearly shown in the works of his Son, and though already God had shown to Jesus great things to be done by him,

20. "*He will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.*"

They had seen him heal the sick, give sight to the blind, and cast out devils, but now they should see that He was the Lord of Life. All the race of man was given by God into his hands for life and for death, and as a sign of this, they should soon see the dead arise at his command.

21—23. "*For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them ; (or giveth them life) even so the Son quickeneth whom He will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.*"

What must have been the feelings of the Jews as they listened ! But no time was given them to speak their thoughts. They had called Jesus before them to answer to the charge of the crime of blasphemy, which by the law was punished with death ; and now Jesus solemnly called upon them to hear *him*, that *they* might be saved from everlasting death.

Verse 24. “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.*”

Solemn, and more solemn still became His words, and higher grew their awful tone—

25—27. “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man.*”

Amazement filled the Jews. Who was this who stood among them, and claimed to have in himself the power of giving life—the life of the body, and the life of the soul? Perhaps, some among them felt that life-giving power already stir within them, for the hour was come when the dead,—not the dead who lay within the grave, but the dead in sin,—should hear the voice of the Son of God, and they who heard should *live*; live as they had never lived before, to God. All gazed in awful astonishment on Him who claimed authority to judge them. He answered their amazement by words more awful still.

28, 29. “*Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his (the Son's) voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*”

We may picture to ourselves that solemn scene, when Jesus stood among the Jews, and called up before their minds the future judgment-day; when He whom they now accused of blasphemy against God, should by God be appointed their

Judge. He spoke of the opening graves, and the awakening dead arising at the sound of *His voice*, and coming forth to judgment, to receive eternal life or eternal death, as they had *here* made their choice. Did they tremble now? O what would be their horror when that voice, from which they now turned away, would rouse them from the heavy sleep of death! When they *must* hear, and hearing must obey!

We do well to picture these things to our minds—to think of them till we seem to hear the Saviour and to see the Jews; for we are but too apt to hear and read the life of Christ as an often-told tale, which passes from our minds as though it had never been. But it is only when we bring the words of Christ home to *ourselves*, that they still have the power of giving life to our souls. To us they are spoken as well as to the Jews.

We too, in our graves, shall hear His voice, and it will depend upon *how* we hear Him now, whether we shall come forth “to the resurrection of eternal life, or to the resurrection of damnation,” for before our *bodies* shall be roused from the sleep of death, our *spirits* shall long have had their state fixed for ever.

Listen to the words of Christ the Lord, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, *hath*, (not shall have, but now has) everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but *is passed* from death unto life”—*is passed out* of a state of death, into a state of life. And this is God's truth. In which state are we? Solemn is the question, but let us not shrink from putting it to ourselves. Do we, each one of us, hear the word of Christ with our ears only, as we would the word of any other wise and holy man, or do we receive it, as it is in truth, the word of God? and do we take it as a warning, shewing the fearful danger of our souls? a guide by which to find our only safety? a guard in all temptation? a comfort in every trouble? our only hope? our only strength when the death of the body must end for ever the time which is given to pass *from* the death of sin, in

which we were born, into the life eternal, which He, the Saviour, came to give to all who will so hear, and so believe his word ?

Never let this question pass from our minds till it is fully answered ; till we can feel that we may prepare to lay down our bodies in the grave, "in the sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection." *

Prayer.

O merciful God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life ; in whom whosoever believeth shall live, though he die ; and whosoever liveth and believeth shall not die eternally, mercifully grant to us, that now, in the time of this our mortal life, we may so hear thy word, so believe in thee, that we may never come into condemnation ; but that now, while yet our bodies live, our souls may pass from the state of sin and death, into a state of holiness and life ; that when we shall depart from this earthly scene, we may rest with Christ our Lord in sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection. Not for ourselves alone we pray, O God. The hour is come when all may hear thy word and live. O send out thy gracious and life-giving Spirit, that none may close their ears against thee, but all may confess thee Lord, and serve thee with gladness of heart, for ever and for ever. Amen.

XI.

The chief men of the Jews, who were met together to judge the Lord Jesus for having made himself "equal with God," saying "that God was his Father," seem to have been, for a time at least, filled with awe. Not a word was spoken. They were silent ; and Jesus went on to repeat what He had before declared, that all his works and actions were from the Eternal God, whose

* Burial Service.

will was His will, for the will of the Father and of the Son were one.

JOHN v. 30. "*I can of mine own self do nothing : as I hear, I judge : and my judgment is just ; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.*"

Jesus did not ask the Jews to believe the wonderful truth, that He who now spoke to them was the Messiah, on His own word only. If He could bring no witness of his truth, He could not be the Messiah so long foretold ; but since He could show them that those witnesses they most respected had declared him to be indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, what excuse had they for not believing him ?

Verses 31, 32. "*If I bear witness of myself (He said) my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me ; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true.*"

God the Father was the great witness for the truth of the Son ; and He had taken care that the Jews should hear this truth. He had spoken to them by the voice of a man whom they honoured, and to whom they had listened. Did they not remember that the Baptist John had pointed him out as the Lamb of God who was to take away the sins of the world ? (John i. 19, 29, 33.) Had they forgotten his answers when they sent unto him, and the record that he bore, that Jesus was the Son of God ?

Jesus reminded them now of this in his anxious desire that they might be saved by being brought to believe in him. But He needed not the witness of any man, and the words of John the Baptist would have been of no value, had they been only his own words which expressed his own opinion ; but God had given John a sign by which he was to know the Messiah. This sign he had seen, and therefore he bore witness of the truth.

The Lord Jesus, full of kind anxiety that the men who had gathered round him should believe and be saved, reminded them of their own message to John the Baptist on the banks of the river Jordan, more than a year before this time, and of John's answers.

33—39. *“Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man : but these things I say, that ye might be saved. He (John) was a burning and a shining light : and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. But I have greater witness than that of John : for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you : for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. Search the scriptures ; for in them ye think ye have eternal life : and they are they which testify of me.”*

The Lord Jesus had no need of the witness of the Baptist John, though for their own sakes He reminded the Jews of it. He called upon them to consider the witness of God shewn in the works He had done—works which no power but the power of God could possibly have done. Yet they were but the beginning of the great things He had come to do. When He had finished his Father's works, they would indeed bear witness of Him that He was the Son of God. God the eternal Father must remain hidden in his own awful glory from the eyes of mortal men. They could not see His shape, they could not hear His voice, though He spake to them in His holy word ; and it was because they did not receive that word in its simple meaning, that they did not know his Son, and would not believe Him. Jesus bade them search the Scriptures. They thought

that in them they should find eternal life. And this was true, for the Scriptures shewed that He, Jesus of Nazareth, was the Messiah, the Saviour. Why then would they not come to him that they might have eternal life? Here was the reason. Their hearts were given up to the love of this world's greatness, to the pride of worldly things, and they could not see the holy beauty that came from God in his Divine Son. If Jesus had come as an earthly prince, in his own name, leading them to fight against the Romans, He would have found a ready welcome. The pomp of man's power they could see, and they could value, though they knew that the greatest prince who was ever clothed in gold and purple soon passed into the grave a handful of dust and ashes. But the greatness that was of God, the power of God himself who, by one word, could rule the world; the simple majesty of Christ the Son of God, they could not see or understand. Christ knew and shewed them the reason.

Verses 41—44. *"I receive not honour from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?"*

Thus spoke Jesus to the rulers of the Jews, and He ended his speech in words that must have called back to their minds His awful warning, that they who were now gathered together against him, they, and all the dead should, in their graves, hear his voice, and should come forth to be judged by him.

Verses 45—47. *"Do not think (He said,) that (in that day) I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"*

If they had read, with simple, humble minds, and earnest hearts, the word of God in the Old Testament, more knowledge would have been given them. They would have learnt not to expect an earthly prince, to flatter their pride by making them great; but a Messiah, whose holy power would lead them back to God, and save them from their sins.

Thus spoke the Saviour of the world. There was no word in reply. In astonishment and in fear the rulers of the Jews, who had met together to seek the life of Jesus, found themselves warned, reproved, and silenced. Their council was ended. They dared do nothing against him whose awful voice thus called them to the judgment-day.

Prayer.

O God, let thy word so abide in us that we may believe in him whom thou hast sent. Give us simple and humble hearts, that in searching the Scriptures we may find eternal life, for they are they which testify of thy Son.

We would come unto thee that we may have life. Teach us that solemn truth, that, if we give our hearts to worldly desires, we cannot love thee or believe the word that thou hast given. O holy Jesus, let the Spirit that was in thee be found in us, that we may not seek the praise of our fellow-men, nor care for the honours we receive one from another; but that we may seek that honour which cometh from God only. And how great is that honour, to be the child of God!

O blessed Saviour, receive us and all who are dear to us into thy family, that, taught by thee, we may seek not our own will, but the will of God, and gladly spend our lives in our appointed work, so that at the last day we may be received into thy kingdom. Amen.

XII.

MATT. XII. 1—4. MARK II. 23. LUKE VI. 1.

The Pharisees only hated Jesus the more for having put them to silence. He had spoken to them openly and solemnly as the Son of God—as the long-promised Messiah, of whom Moses and the prophets did write: but, though they could not answer him again, their hearts were only the more turned against him. He taught a pure religion, which was to change the whole mind of man, to raise the thoughts and wishes above earthly things, to the honour that cometh from God only; and the Pharisees saw that, if Jesus was received and obeyed by the people as their Lord, their own power would be at an end.

They were determined that He should not succeed; and from that time they took care to watch all he did and said. Some of them seem to have followed him from place to place, laying hold of every word and deed from which they could have the least pretence for accusing him to the people, and stirring up their minds against him.

Our Lord knew well their hatred, and their purpose. He knew that all his steps were watched, especially on the Sabbath-day, for it was chiefly on the Sabbath they hoped to find some reason for accusing him. He calmly went on his way. His religion was to be the light of the world, and He would not hide that light for any fear of man. He had come to separate the evil from the good, and one of the greatest evils that the malice and cunning of Satan has brought upon the world, is the having so mixed sin with holy things that religion itself has been made the excuse for the pride of man's heart. All this the Lord Jesus was come to destroy. He was come to give back the holy, simple truth, to free the pure word of God from the traditions or sayings of men.

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Calmly He went on his way, and having, as soon as the feast of the passover was ended, left Jerusalem, He returned with his disciples to Galilee. He cared not that his steps were watched by his enemies. His only care was to work out that which his Father had given him to do, and, while we read of him, let *us* lift up our hearts to God in earnest prayer that we may have grace given us, like him, calmly, diligently to follow on through the path of duty, caring not for the praise or blame of such men as seek only this world's glory. Let us, like our blessed Lord, seek that honour that cometh from God only, even the honour of doing his will, and helping others to know him and to serve him.

While the Lord Jesus was on his way from Jerusalem to Galilee,

LUKE vi. 1. *"It came to pass on the second Sabbath after the first,* that He went through the corn-fields; and his disciples (were an hungred † and) plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands."*

MATTHEW xii. 2. *"But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the Sabbath-day."*

In the law given by God in old times to the Jews, the way-faring man was expressly allowed to take what he wanted of the fruits and grains that grew on each side of the road by which he went, that he might satisfy his hunger; for, in those countries, in those early times, when the law was first given, there were few dwelling-places of men, and inns there were none, so that, had it not been for this kind law, the stranger must often have been faint and weary, often must have fallen down by the way-side before he could reach shelter for the night. All the laws of God

* "Second Sabbath," counting from the feast of Pentecost. See for explanation the note in Scott's Bible, on the 1st verse of Luke vi. which is too long to give here

† Matt. xii. 1.

are full of love and of kindness. He wins men's hearts to his holy religion by his fatherly care ; and, if we will but look into his laws, we shall find that He does not forbid one thing that is for the *happiness* of man. He forbids only such things as are really hurtful to him. He permits and commands all those kindly feelings and all those innocent pleasures that make up a happy life. How different is man from God ! When He would set himself up as a lawgiver in matters of religion, he changes its whole character. Religion in man's hands is no more the gentle, careful rule of a loving Father, but the harsh laws of a stern master ; and the service man exacts seems worthless in his eyes unless it sacrifices all the gentler feelings of our nature. More or less we shall find that wherever man has left the simple word of God, and himself made rules of religion, his pride of heart has always made him stern and harsh where God was kind and full of mercy.

It was the law of God that, on the Sabbath-day, man was to rest from labour, and to keep it holy. The weary labourer and mechanic know what a precious gift their Father in heaven has given them in the rest of the Sabbath-day. All *may* know the blessing of having one day in seven in which it is their duty to put from them the vexing thoughts of worldly business. The Sabbath is a blessing made and given for the use of man ; but the Pharisees had, by *their* laws, changed the blessing into a burthen and an evil. They had made it unlawful for the hungry man to put forth his hand and to take of the fruits of the field to satisfy his hunger, and gladly they found fault with the disciples of Jesus, and with Jesus himself, for allowing them to take the ears of corn as they passed through the fields, and for rubbing the grains in their hands that they might eat, when they were an hungred.

The answer Jesus made put them in mind of the time, long past, when the laws of God were understood and kept, as *He* gave them, not as *they* had made them.

MATTHEW xii. 3, 4. "*He said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him : How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew-bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, but only for the priests ?*" *

They honoured David as a prophet,—as the man after God's own heart. He was the king chosen by God himself, and the name of David was the glory of their nation. Yet he had shewn them, by taking for himself and his men the bread which by the law it was not lawful for any but the priests to take, that he knew and trusted God as his *Father*, who would allow him to satisfy his hunger, when he was in great need, by putting on one side for the time, the rule for the service of the temple. The sins of David are spoken of in Scripture, and deeply he repented them ; but this was never counted to him as a sin, because it concerned only one of the laws of ceremonies, good in themselves, but intended to yield to the great, the universal law of mercy.

So also with the rules for the strict rest of the Sabbath-day. The Lord Jesus shewed the Pharisees that, at all times, such works were allowed as were needful for the service of God. He said to them,

MATTHEW xii. 5, 6. "*Have ye not read in the law, how*

* It was commanded in the Law given by God to Moses for the service of the Temple, that there should be placed in the Temple twelve unleavened cakes in loaves, with frankincense, as an offering to the Lord.

They were to be changed every Sabbath-day by the Priests, and they only had a right to eat the bread that was taken away, and they were to eat it in the Holy Place, for it had been offered "before the Lord." Lev. xxiv. 5—9.

No doubt, the bread was thus to be continually offered as a sign of the praise and thanks due to God for continually giving man bread to support his body, and "the bread of life," John vi. 35, 48—51., to support his soul, and the frankincense, which was a sweet perfume, was commanded to be offered with it, as a sign of the prayers and thanksgivings of the saints. Rev. v. 8.

that on the Sabbath-days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place is One greater than the temple."

The strictest of the Pharisees would never think of blaming the priests for the work they did on the Sabbath in the temple, though it was no light labour to prepare the sacrifices, to tend the fires on the altar, and many other things that were needful to be done. They knew that all this it was right to do, because it was in the service of the great God, of whose presence among them the temple was a sign.

The Lord Jesus had taken back the thoughts of the Pharisees to the old time of Moses and of king David. He led them on through the Sabbath-service, still performed by the priests in the temple, up to the day in which He spoke to them; and then, standing in the corn-fields with his disciples round him, He said, "I say unto you, that *in this place* is one greater than the temple." He, the man Jesus Christ, was the *Reality* of which the temple was only the *sign*, God manifest in the flesh, dwelling among men; and, if the priests were blameless in the work they had to do on the Sabbath-day for the service of the temple, much more were his disciples blameless for gathering the ears of corn to satisfy their hunger that they might follow and serve him on the Sabbath-day. But it was plain that, the Pharisees did not understand the Fatherly character of God, or they would have seen that all his commandments sought the good, and therefore the happiness, of men.

MATTHEW xii. 7. "*But (said our Lord) if you had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.*" Hosea vi. 6.

This was the second time the Lord Jesus had told the Pharisees to remember these words of the prophet Hosea, and to think of their meaning. When they had found fault with him

for sitting down to eat with publicans and sinners, He had said to them, "Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice," (Matt. ix. 13.) and if they had obeyed him,—if they had taken the word of God, and read what the prophet Hosea had said, they would have learnt that "knowledge of God" which he tells them was more desired by him "than burnt-offerings," (Hosea vi. 6.) and they would have found the truth of the promise given by Hosea, "then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord," (Hosea vi. 3.)

MARK ii. 27, 28. *"And he (Jesus) said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath. Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath."*

The sabbath day was made and given to man as a blessing and a gift. The Great God who created man knows his need: He knows how much the things that are seen take away our thoughts from the far more precious things that are not seen, the things belonging to the kingdom of heaven that will last for ever, and therefore He gave from the beginning, one day, in which it is our duty as well as our interest, to put out of our minds the thoughts of worldly business, and worldly care.

Even in Paradise, before sin had made these things an idol and a snare, while the thoughts of man could as naturally rise to his God as the perfume of the flowers naturally rises upwards to the skies, even then, God knew that one day in seven in which Adam need not think of the Garden of Eden, which on other days was to be his care, would be a blessing; and therefore for the sake of man in creating the world and all things in it, He gave the example of resting on the seventh day. But when sin had ruined all, when the ground was cursed because of sin, and man was forced to labour till by the sweat of his brow, he made it bring forth its fruits, then the sabbath-day was a blessing and a gift indeed. Without some day of rest the race of man must soon have died off from

the face of the earth, for no human strength can labour on with ceaseless toil.* Therefore because it is a blessing and a gift, "the Son of Man is Lord also of the sabbath." He came upon earth in the form of man, that through him all precious gifts and blessings might be given to man; and the best way to keep holy the Sabbath-day is to remember that Jesus is its Lord, and whatever forwards the work He came to do, is, and must be, pleasing to him. God is glorified in man's real good, and whatever forwards that good belongs to his service, and is lawful to do on the Sabbath-day.

Prayer.

Lord of the Sabbath, we bless thee for thy loving-kindness, that thou hast given us one day in seven, that we may rest from labour and from care. One day in which the weary body may repose, the harassed mind cease from troubling. Teach us, Lord of the Sabbath, teach us by thine own Spirit how to keep it holy, as thou wouldest have it kept, that it may neither become a bondage to any by the vexing strictness of those who, like the Pharisees, would change thy Fatherly gifts into a burden; nor a snare, by the sinful levity of those who make thy Sabbath a day of worldly pleasure.

We pray thee, O Holy Jesus, to watch over thy Sabbaths, that they may be indeed a rest from sin, and from all the toil, and all the cares that sin has brought. Grant that they may be a bond of love for all thy people; that the children of one family, though scattered into far different lands, may have

* After the French Revolution of 1792, it was attempted to do away with the the Seventh day's rest from labour, and the tenth day was given as a holiday instead; but after a short time the rulers of France were forced to return to the first law given by God, "Thou shalt rest on the seventh day." They found that to work during nine days was very different from working six days, and that the strength of man was not equal to it. In this way they proved what they might have known before, that God, who created man, knows best the needs of man.

their affections drawn together by the sweet bond of the Sabbath. On that holy day may their hearts meet together in prayer and praise; may the absent be with us, and we with them. O give some rest from pain upon thy Sabbath-day, that the sick may bless thee, that the mourner may rejoice; or if thy wisdom, which cannot err, sees that this would not be for the sufferer's eternal good, give for thy dear love's sake, on thy Sabbath-day, a double portion of thy Spirit, that thy sorrowing children may be enabled more clearly to see into thy heavenly kingdom, where those who have, like thee, passed through great tribulation, and "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," may be enabled to *rest* in the blessed hope that they too shall soon be with that happy band before the throne, where thou, O Saviour, shalt "lead them unto living fountains of water: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." (Rev. vi. 14—17.) Thus, O Holy Jesus, let thy sabbath be to man the precious gift thou wouldest have it. Let it bring to every home an increase of love and peace, let it unite in spirit those who are parted from one another; let it bring comfort and hope to the sorrowful, as well as rest to the weary, and let our hymns of Sabbath praise rise as a cloud of incense from the whole of thy redeemed world, for this thy great gift of the Sabbath-day.

XIII.

MATT. XII. 9. MARK III. 1. LUKE VI. 6.

Calmly the Saviour went on his way. His lessons on the right keeping of the Sabbath-day were not ended. The people of God in all ages, were to learn from him *how*, upon the Sabbath, they were to give themselves up to the service of the Lord of the Sabbath. The Lord Jesus was returning to Galilee. The way was long, but when He came to a town,—

LUKE vi. 6, 7. "*On another Sabbath He entered into the synagogue and taught ; and there was a man whose right hand was withered. And the Scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether He would heal (the man) on the Sabbath-day, that they might find an accusation against him.*"

MATTHEW xii. 10. "*And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath-days ? that they might accuse him.*"

LUKE vi. 8. "*But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth. Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing ; Is it lawful on the Sabbath-days to do good, or to do evil ? to save life, or to destroy it ?*"

MATTHEW xii. 11, 12. "*What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath-day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out ? How much then is a man better than a sheep ? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath-days.*"

MARK iii. 5. "*And when He had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, He saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out : and his hand was restored whole as the other.*"

LUKE vi. 11. "*And they were filled with madness ; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.*"

MARK iii. 6. "*And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians * against him, how they might destroy him.*"

Who can add a word to this history ! How completely does it bring back before our eyes that long-past time ! The syna-

* The Herodians seem to have been a party who were particularly attached to Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Galilee, and therefore jealous of the manner in which the people followed Jesus. See Biblical Cyclopaedia.

gogue filled with an anxious expecting crowd of men whose minds were stirred within them to know "if this were indeed the very Christ:" the proud, revengeful Pharisees, with fierce eyes fixed on Jesus, watching every look and word that they might find a cause to take his life; and the man who was there with his right hand withered:—his eyes too, were bent on Jesus; but his look was a prayer; he hoped to be healed:—and Jesus, in his calm majesty, his Divine power, reading every thought of every heart before him! We almost seem to hear his voice, when He said unto the man with the withered hand, "Stand forth."

This is the third time the Lord Jesus showed the true use and meaning of the Sabbath-day, and each time He gave a different proof that it was lawful and right to perform acts of kindness on the Sabbath-day.

When, at the pool of Bethesda He healed the man who had for forty years been a cripple, He bade the Pharisees remember how God carried on his works of mercy on the Sabbath as on other days. If God, as they knew He did, caused his sun to shine, and his rain to fall on the Sabbath, if He blessed the physician's skill and made the sick man well on the Sabbath as on other days, never stopping in his works of mercy and of power, why should not Jesus, his Son, also in the same manner work on the Sabbath-day?

And when the disciples rubbed in their hands and ate the ears of corn to satisfy their hunger, as they passed through the fields on the Sabbath-day, the Lord Jesus had bidden the Pharisees remember what David had done when he was an hungred, without blame; and had pointed out to them, that the Priests had much work to do on the Sabbath, in the service of the temple; therefore, that *whatever* was done in his service, was well done, and was work fit for the Sabbath, for He was greater than the temple, which was but a type (or picture) of his body, in which God was dwelling among men. Now, He bade the

Pharisees remember, that for *their own sakes they would themselves* work on the Sabbath-day, and say that it was right, for that it was a work of mercy. They knew there was not one among them who would not lay hold of his sheep and lift it out of a pit, into which it had fallen, on the Sabbath-day. And why would they do this? was it not because the sheep was their own,—that it was of value, and that to leave it in the pit till the next day, would be cruel, and perhaps would kill it? And was not a man of more value than a sheep? Did he not belong to God his maker, and did not God watch over him to do him good? Was it not then right to help the poor man who had the withered hand, on the Sabbath-day?

Jesus had said, if any of them had *one* sheep, would they not help it out of a pit on the Sabbath? for He knew how man values that of which he has but *one*. How precious, how dear that *one* becomes. And yet He tells us here, that each one of us is still more dear to God. Thus does He seem to say, that had there been but one soul to save, Christ would have come to save that single soul; and thus his love for *each of us* is a love for *each one*, as great, as careful, as if He had but that only one to be his child.

Yes, it is true that the great God, the Creator, and the Lord of worlds

“ Sees all, as if that all were one;
Loves one, as if that one were all.” *

Is it difficult to believe this? Does it seem impossible that *each one* of the millions that have filled, and do fill the world, can be dear to the heart of God, even as one, only one, would be? Let the father and the mother of a large family reply. Is it not true that *each* child of the seven, or eight, or ten, or even of a much larger family, becomes dear as if it were an *only* child, just as it wants help and comfort most? If grief or sickness falls upon it, it does not find its mother's love and

* Rev. J. W. Cunningham.

its father's care the less because it has many brothers and many sisters. And if this is true of us, the powers of whose hearts and minds are so little when compared to the *boundless* powers of loving and of knowing, of the mighty Father of all ; do we not feel that it *must be true* of him and each child of his large family ? And we need to know this—to be *assured of it*, in that dark hour when we must each venture forth *alone from life* into a new, an unknown world, where if we have not the sure love of God to look to, we feel that we must be lost.

‘ Can it be that my Saviour loves ME, ME MYSELF, who am but a little one among *so many* ? ’ said a dying girl, as she strove to raise her affections from her parents to her God. Her voice, her look, told how much depended on that question, and great was the peace that filled her soul when she saw from holy Scripture, that she herself was yet dearer to God than the one only lost lamb is dear to the poor man, who cannot rest till he has found and saved it. (Luke xv. 4.)

All the words of the Lord Jesus are full of power, and of deep and holy meaning, and if we take them into our hearts, and keep them there, and ponder on them, we shall find that they have power to charm away every grief and every fear ; yes, even in the valley of the shadow of death.*

* “ My Beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire.” Solomon’s Song, i. 14.

In times of infectious disease it is a safe thing to wear pieces of camphire, fastened in the dress *close* to the bosom, for there is a virtue in the smell of camphire that keeps off infection, and the words of Christ kept in the bosom, close to our hearts, have a power, that nothing else can have, to keep off the infection of sin.

May not this be Solomon’s meaning when he makes the Bride, that is, the Church of Christ, say, that her well-beloved is to her as a bundle of myrrh, (another healthful perfume which has something of the same virtue as camphire) and as a cluster of camphire that she will keep in her bosom all the night ? If we keep Christ in our nearest love during the night of sorrow and of sin, nothing shall have power to harm us ; and when the glad morning of the Resurrection shall chase away all darkness from our souls, we shall rise at the sound of His voice, and go forth with Him to dwell with Him for ever.

It is written, that when Jesus had thus spoken to the Pharisees, He looked round about upon them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts. Only once, and it is in this place, did Jesus look with *anger* upon his enemies, and it was not because they were seeking to harm him, to take away his life, it was because He was *grieved* for the hardness of their hearts, so grieved that his anger was moved against them, for their *wilful* sin that strove against all his kindness, that blinded their eyes so that they *would not* see. They accused *him* of breaking the holy rest of the Sabbath, because He, on that day, gave the sufferers rest from suffering, and *they* on the Sabbath sought his life,—sought to raise the passions of the people against him! Was this to keep holy the Sabbath-day? Was this to make it the blessing to man for which God had given it, to raise his thoughts, his affections and his hopes to heaven, to rest from the sinful cares and *vexing* toils of earth! Jesus “was grieved for the hardness of their hearts!”

Prayer.

O my Saviour, thou hast suffered for our sins, let us not grieve thee by hardening our hearts against thee. Let the voice of thy love have power to call our affections from the world home to thee. Let the thought that we are thine fill us with peace in life and in death, for thou art with us, thou wilt not see us fall into danger without stretching forth thy right hand to deliver us. O fill us then with this holy confidence that as the earthly parent knows and loves each single child, so among the thousand thousands that need thy care on earth—*we are each one of us* known and loved by thee; make us to feel assured that when the earth and all things in it have passed away, and thy people, redeemed by thee, shall rejoice together in thy bright heavens, a multitude whom no man can number, that in their joyful hymns of praise thou shalt know each separate voice, and that each one of us shall enjoy thy love even as an *only*

child. O holy, holy God, let this thought never leave us through life, let it be hidden in our bosoms as a charm to keep away the infection of sin, and in the solemn hour of death, let this thought of thy tender, careful love bear our fainting spirits up, till safely laid within thine arms, our God and Saviour. Amen.

XIV.

MATT. XII. 14. MARK III. 6—8. LUKE VI. 11, 17—19.

We have read how the Lord Jesus put to silence the Pharisees, even while before them He did the very thing they counted as a crime. He had healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath-day in the midst of the synagogue, and He had shewn them that, in doing so, He had done no more than each one of them would have done for his sheep, if on the Sabbath-day it had fallen into a pit. He had, on three different Sabbaths, shewn them how God was to be glorified in every work that was done in his service, and that to do good to man was to serve God. They could not answer him, but they were all the more furious against him.

LUKE vi. 11. “*And they were filled with madness ; and communed (talked) one with another what they might do to Jesus.*”

MARK iii. 6. “*And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.*”

The Pharisees who had followed our Lord from Jerusalem, in the hope of finding some cause to stir up the people against him, found that they must form some new plan ; so they raised up against him a new set of enemies. These were the Herodians, who would not only be very willing to join them against

Jesus, but who would have more opportunities of watching every thing that He said and did. These people were called Herodians, because they were much attached to Herod, who had built them a beautiful city on the shores of the Sea of Galilee,* and had done so much for them that, in return, they liked to flatter him and to please him in every way they could. Now Herod (the same Herod who at this time had put John the Baptist in prison) was Tetrarch, or ruler, of Galilee; but he wished to be made king of the Jews, as his father had been, and for the very same reason that the father had cruelly tried to kill the Lord Jesus when He was an infant, because he was jealous of him, so it was likely that the son would gladly have him put to death now that the people began to whisper that He certainly was the Messiah, and therefore the rightful king of the Jews.

The Pharisees guessed well that the Herodians, who were so devoted to the service of Herod, would be very willing to help them in their plans against the life of Jesus. They knew too that, as they lived in Galilee, where Jesus lived, they would constantly be with him, and therefore would be more likely to be believed when the time came to accuse Jesus before the Roman governor; for you must remember that the Jews had no

* Tiberias—built by Herod, as some say, on the site, or very near the site of the ancient Chinnereth or Kinnereth. If this is so, it is probable that one of the names of the Lake “Gennesareth” comes from this name Chinnereth. In order to build the city of Tiberias, Herod was obliged to remove many ancient tombs, and it being contrary to the law of Moses to dwell in any place that had been defiled by the burial of the dead, he was obliged to force many of his subjects to inhabit his new city. To reconcile them to this, he built them houses at his own expence, and shewed them especial favour. Herod, like his father, was a great flatterer of the Emperors of Rome, by whom he hoped to have been made king. He called his new city, Tiberias, after the Emperor Tiberius, by way of shewing his affection and respect for him.

The present town, Tabaria, is built on the same place, about the middle of the western side of the sea of Galilee. It is not so large, and has not above 4000 inhabitants, most of whom are Jews.

power to put any man to death, and it was by the Romans only that Jesus could be condemned to die.

This was a well-laid plan, and no doubt the Pharisees thought they must now surely succeed ; but they were mistaken, the time was not yet come. The Lord Jesus had yet much work to do, and He would not give himself up into their power till He had finished the work his Father had given him to do. This new plan of his enemies was no sooner made than Jesus knew it.

MARK III. 7. "*But Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea.*"

He would not remain in any town. He chose to dwell for a time among the hills and vallies of the beautiful shores of the sea of Galilee, but He could no longer be alone. Not only

LUKE VI. 17. "*The company of his disciples (followed him there) but also a great multitude of people out of all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases ; and they that were vexed with unclean spirits : * and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him ; for there went virtue (or power) out of him, and healed them all.*"

Can we wonder that the people thus left their homes to follow Jesus ?

Tyre and Sidon were very far away on the distant sea-shore, Jerusalem was quite at the other end of the country ; the people must have travelled many a weary mile to reach Galilee, where Jesus was to be found, but they had heard of the wonderful cures done by him. They had heard that He never refused his kindness to any,—that to all He taught the glad news of the kingdom of heaven. Many of them had seen his wonderful works, and had heard his gracious words when they had

* See No. VI.

been at Jerusalem to keep the solemn feast of the passover, and they had taken back such a report of him to their different homes, that the whole country, moved as one man, came forth to seek him. Can we think this wonderful, when we know that all men were in expectation of the Messiah, whose coming had been so long promised? No, we cannot; but we may well think it wonderful that all men do not now flock to Christ the Lord, who we know assuredly to be the Messiah, the same now as He was then, mighty to save, yesterday, to-day, and for ever; who still says to all, "Come unto me and be ye saved." And many would go to Christ had they a journey to take to find him, and could they see him with their mortal eyes; for many like to do great things, who are without that simple faith which would lead them *really* to Christ. Not all in these crowds who flocked to Jesus on the shores of the sea of Galilee became his disciples. Curiosity and pride, and a thousand different feelings took them there, just as it would be now; and we may feel certain that if we will not *now* seek Christ where He may always be found, in our own homes; if we will not meekly kneel down to him now, though we cannot see him, and seek from him the virtue and the power that is still in him, neither should we have become his true disciples if we had been of the crowds who travelled so far to find him.

Prayer.

Well may we seek thee, blessed Saviour, for we have all manner of diseases to afflict us in body and mind, and that worst disease of all, sin, that cometh from the Evil Spirit, doth surely vex us, and hinder us on our way to thee. But in thee there is power to heal us, and, O blessed be thy name, in thee there is the will; for still thou dost stretch forth thine arms unto us, still dost thou call us to leave all vain and sinful things that would hold us back, and to come unto thee that we may have life.

This is the journey we are called upon to take that we may find thee. It is not our homes we are to leave behind us, but all sinful desires. We need not now seek thee in the desert ; in the bosom of our families thou wilt be found ; our own homes may be thy temple ; every duty and every pleasure may be thy service. O holy Jesus, blessed Lord, do thou thus dwell with us, do thou thus cause us to seek thee, and in our houses, in our gardens, our fields, and in the places of our business, let thy Spirit whisper in our hearts, "The Lord is here." Thus may thy kingdom, Father Almighty, be established within us, for the sake of thy dear Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

XV.

MATT. XII. MARK III. LUKE VI.

MATTHEW xii. 15, 16. "*Great multitudes followed him, (to the borders of the great lake, called the Sea of Galilee) and He healed them all ; and charged them that they should not make him known.*"

Why did our Lord thus wish them to keep silence when He came on earth to save mankind, and to make known the good news of his kingdom ?

The Pharisees plotted to take away the life of Jesus, and He knew it. He not only could have brought help from God his Father in any shape He chose, but He might have called upon the men who crowded to him from every part of the country, to rise in his defence. Had He done this He soon would have found an army ready to fight for him. Men looked for the Messiah to come as an earthly prince, and they would have more readily believed that the Lord Jesus was their Messiah if He

had called upon them to be his soldiers and to fight for him ; but He was come to raise men's thoughts from the violence of earth to the peace of heaven. His religion was, not to rule the world by men's swords, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, changing their hearts into obedience to God's laws ; and He gently withdrew himself from his enemies, instead of fighting against them, and for some time He told those whom He healed, not to make known abroad his wonderful works ; but rather to be silent about him, that He might give no needless offence to his enemies. Had He but raised his hand to the eager crowds, in sign that He needed their help, the shores of the peaceful lake would have echoed with sounds of war, and from one end of Judea to the other, the people would have risen to fight for their King, the long-expected Messiah.

But now, by his forbearance, were brought to pass these words spoken, hundreds of years before, by the prophet Isaiah, who had been taught by God thus to describe the true Messiah :—

18—21. *“ Behold my servant, whom I have chosen ; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased : I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry : neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.”*

These few lines have in them the history of Christ and his religion.

Jesus, the beloved of God, his own, and only Son, chosen by the Father to redeem the world,—that He might do this great work, became a *servant*, for He took the shape of man, and came among us as man. We have read how God put his Spirit upon him, when, as He was baptized in the river Jordan

by the Baptist John, "the Holy Ghost descended from heaven upon him like a dove, and abode upon him." *

We have read how He *showed judgment*, or the power of knowing the truth, to the woman of Samaria,† and to the Samaritans, who came forth from their city to hear him, and we shall read how He taught and comforted those of every nation (called Gentiles by the Jews) who came to him. We see how truly his gentleness and calm perseverance made true those words of the prophet, "He shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets," for our Lord never entered into any of the fierce disputes that filled men's minds then, even as they fill them now; for there has been no time in the world in which questions, of very little consequence when compared to *the great question*, "What must we do to be saved?" ‡ have not been so eagerly disputed, that men have forgotten how quickly they themselves must pass away, and their disputes be forgotten. We shall do wisely and well to follow our blessed Lord's example, and to fix our minds and our affections upon the great truths of his religion, and never to join in those disputes that year after year lead men's minds away from God, and change the simple love of Christ into party spirit, and angry strife.

The prophet had also said, "a bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench; and in his name shall the Gentiles trust."

Oh, is not this true now as it was then? When grief and pain, and fear, have made the poor tempted soul like a bruised reed, does not the Saviour bind up the broken heart? and when faith is low, even like the feeble spark of light, does He not by his tender love, and by the help of his unseen Spirit, fan instead of quench the flame till the darkness is gone, we know not how? we only know, that instead of doubting as we

* No. XIX. p. 85. Vol. I.

† No. XXXII. Vol. I.

‡ See this question *and its answer*, Acts xvi.

had done, the blessed truth that *Christ is the Saviour* shines out more clear than ever it had done before. Thus judgment, the power of judging rightly, shall have the victory. And in his name the Gentiles do trust. We (the people of England) are Gentiles, and though, alas! Christ the Lord is not yet honoured and obeyed as He should be, and as He will be, yet as a people we call him *our Lord*, and *in his name we trust*. So is it, or so will it be, with the people in every land, for it is written in God's word that, "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Isaiah ii. 9. Hab. ii. 14.

Prayer.

O Holy Jesus, let the Spirit that was in thee be also in us. Let this one desire, that God may be glorified in the salvation of men's souls, so fill our hearts, that we may have no time or thought for the vain disputes that stir up the minds of men, and hinder the cause of true religion. We bless thee for thy tender love, for thine unseen but never-failing help. When the burden of my sins is upon me, I am but a bruised reed. I cannot see thy supporting arm, but I know that if thou hadst not held me up, I must long since have fallen to rise no more. My faith has sometimes been like a dying lamp, nearly gone; I have not seen *how* thou hast fed the flame, but *I know* thou hast fed it; for I still believe, I still cling to thee as my only hope, and I know thou wilt never leave me nor forsake me, but wilt give to thy truth the victory.

Glory and thanks, and praise be unto thee, O God: in thee we trust, O hasten the time when *all* shall know thee and love thee, through Jesus Christ *our Lord*. Amen.

XVI.

MATT. X. 2—4. MARK III. 13—19. LUKE VI. 12—17.

The crowds that pressed round the Lord Jesus on the shores

of the sea of Galilee were so great, that few could either see or hear him, therefore

MARK iii. 9—12. "*He spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him. For He had healed many; inso-much that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had plagues. And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God.* And He straitly charged them that they should not make him known.*"†

It was on the shores of the sea of Galilee, that our Saviour passed by far the greater part of the time He was on earth; therefore it will be good for us to know this lake, and the country round it so well, that we shall be able to see it as in a picture, in our minds. In the time of our Lord, 1849 years ago, its shores were covered with towns and villages, except on the north side, which might well be called "a desert place apart." (Matt. xiv. 13.) The shore here is so covered with broken rocks, and is so wild and gloomy, that it looks as though some strange earthquake had passed over it. It is indeed a desert.

But words cannot tell the beauty of the lake as you look down upon it from the heights above. Bedded among the mountains like a glittering mirror of crystal, every shadow and every cloud is reflected upon its blue waters; ‡ but they are never still, for the river Jordan flows rapidly through them, from the north to the south, keeping the lake in con-

* See No. VI. after verse 26.

† For the reason of this, see the beginning of last number.

‡ From the northern end being so covered with volcanic remains, it is thought that the bed of the whole lake had been the crater of a volcano, in some early time of the world's history. Its length is reckoned to be from twelve to fifteen miles, and its breadth from six to nine miles. Its waters are very clear, and full of excellent fish. Streams from the mountains round are continually falling into them.

tinual, though gentle motion. Looking down upon it from the heights above, the white foam sparkles, like silver, on the face of the rippling water.

When a storm of wind from the south-east comes sweeping down the mountains into the lake, it meets the current of the river **Jordan**, and in a moment the waves rise into a tempest. Woe to the fisher's boat that had met that storm! But whether the lake be lashed into fury by the winds, or ripple brightly beneath the glorious skies of the East, the mountains ever stand around it in quiet majesty. Far above them all rises Mount Hermon, which is also Sion, (Deut. iv. 48.) distant, yet near enough to throw its shadow on the water. Even in the hottest summer it is crowned with snow, and its solemn height, rising into the sky, stirs in the heart the remembrance of the past days, when king David so often spoke of Mount Hermon in his beautiful Psalms. And when the setting sun throws its slanting rays upon the woods of Mount Tabor, the lake glitters for a moment in the parting light, and the golden day is gone. But even more beautiful is the solemn night that comes. Dark shadows of the mountains lie upon the lake. Even through the darkness, the snowy top of Hermon is pictured on the waters, as the moon, rising almost behind the mountain, throws her rays like a path of glimmering silver across the bosom of the lake.

This is, this was the sea of Galilee, and we shall be better able in thought to follow our Saviour's steps, and understand his doings, if we thus picture it to our minds, as we read :—

LUKE vi. 12. "*It came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*"

From sun-rise to sun-set the Lord Jesus taught the people; listened to their complaints and petitions, and healed their diseases. At evening He was wearied, as we should have been,

and sought for rest—rest from the sound and sight of misery—rest from the griefs that sin had brought. Among these mountains, on the shores of that lake, far away from man, alone with God his Father, the holy Son refreshed his soul. How solemn is the thought! The whole night long He prayed. And what *his* prayers must have been! They were the Son's communion with the Father! What a gushing forth of holiest love. What asking and receiving help for the human nature He had taken for a time, that He might do His Father's will and save mankind. What earnest prayer to God to look down upon and strengthen him in the work He was carrying on (for Jesus knew that the very next day He was to bring, as it were into his family, the traitor who was to betray Him.) What child-like willingness to suffer his Father's will! What holy joy that men and angels should see the Father glorified, and Satan the destroyer's power overthrown! What a longing to return to his Father's bosom! All this must have been in the Saviour's prayer. No wonder that the whole night long He prayed, for prayer was to him, a time spent with his Father. O that we could thus pray! He bent his nature down to ours, that he might raise our nature up to his, or rather He took ours upon him that it might be brought into fellowship with his own, therefore our prayers may be, should be, like his, the outpouring of our hearts to our Father, God. And let us follow the example of our blessed Lord. When we have some great thing to do, let us the more earnestly pray. He was about to choose the twelve Apostles, and to appoint to them their work; the whole night long, before He did this, He prayed. We cannot pray a whole night, nor need we, "for our Father knoweth what we have need of before we ask him." But we can, and we must, humbly and earnestly ask of him that wisdom which is from above, and which He willingly gives to all who seek for it. (James i. 5.)

When the sun rose again from behind the mountains, and

glittered upon the lake, the Son of God returned to his mighty work, which He was now about to put into a more regular form. We have seen how He was followed from place to place, by some who were more particularly his disciples. We have read the manner in which Jesus had received six of these,* and what He had said to them when they first joined him.† We have also read the miracle by which He shewed them that they might safely trust to him for support, when they, for his sake, gave up the work by which, till then, they had earned their living,‡ and the assurance He gave them that they should succeed in the new work He gave them to do. It was now needful regularly to appoint twelve chosen men from among his followers, that He might send them forth, in his name, and in his power, to carry the good news of the Gospel through all the land. It is written that,

LUKE xii. 13. “ *When it was day, He called unto Him (whom He would of) His disciples : and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named Apostles.*”

MARK iii. 14, 15. “ *And He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils.*”

“ The seed of the woman shall bruise thy head,” God said to that old serpent, who is the devil, in the beginning of the history of the world ; and the New Testament is, from the beginning to the end of it, the history of the way in which these words were made true. Jesus, God, in the shape of man, born of the Virgin, and therefore “ the seed of the woman,” carried on open war against the kingdom of Satan, and He now chose twelve to act under Him, and gave them his own power that they might go forth against the enemy.

* See Vol. I. No. XXIV. John i. 38. xxxvi. Matt. iv. 18—22.

† No. XXXVII. Luke v. 4—9.

MATTHEW X. 2—4 “*Now the names of the twelve apostles are these : the first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother ; * James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother ; Philip and Bartholomew (believed to be Nathanael) Thomas, and Matthew the publican ; James the son of Alphæus ; † and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddæus (or Judas, the brother of James.) ‡ Simon the Canaanite ; § and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.*”

The Lord Jesus called to him from the crowd below “who He would,” and, of those whom He chose, one was the man who in the end was to betray Him ; and He knew it, for from him nothing was hid ; that which was to come was present to his mind as that which already was. All the events of his life and death were determined from the beginning. It was necessary that He should be given up into the hand of His enemies ; but the holy Jesus made no man a traitor ; He chose from the many there, one in whose heart He saw that love of

* No. XXIV. Vol. I.

† James, son of Alpheus or *Cleophas*. His mother, Mary, was sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, and as the Jews called their near kinsman *brother*, it is probable this is the meaning of his being called “James, the Lord’s brother.” Gal. i. 19. Milman.

‡ Luke vi. 16. Judas in Syriac is Thaddai. It is not clear whether his other name Lebbaeus, is from the town of Lebba on the coast of the sea of Galilee, or from a word meaning “the heart,” and therefore nearly the same as Thaddai, which means “the breast.”

§ Also called Zelotes—The word Canaanite does not mean, as is often supposed, from Cana, nor yet that he was of Canaanite descent. It is from a Hebrew word which means Zealot, to which dangerous sect Simon belonged before he became the disciple of Christ. See Milman. The leader of the sect of the Zealots, was that Judas of Galilee spoken of by Gamaliel in Acts v. He taught that it was unlawful to pay tribute to the Romans, and his followers maintained this doctrine by force of arms against the Romans. The sect became little better than a band of robbers. See *Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature*.

|| Judas the Traitor was probably named Iscariot, from a small village named Iscara, or from the town Carioth in the tribe of Judah.

money which would cause him to sell his Lord. (Matt. xxvi. 23—25.)

In the heart of Judas Iscariot covetousness lay like a small seed. He was called by Jesus into near fellowship with Himself; surely He might have struggled and prayed against its growth, and perhaps He would have done so, had he looked upon it as sin; but we shall see how he yielded to temptation, (John xii. 4—6.) how he, in secret, nursed the evil wish, till that small seed of covetousness grew into a poison-tree, and deadly were its fruits. (Matt. xxvi. 14—16. 47—50. xxvii. 3—5.)

God in kindness hides from us that which is to come, and we go on from year to year, from day to day, in peaceful enjoyment, to the very hour in which our past blessings are to become the causes of our grief. How often do years of happiness pass over the mother, watching and rejoicing in the childhood of the son who, when he is a man, will bring her grey hairs with sorrow to the grave! How much enjoyment is often found for half a life-time in those very friends who are in the end estranged, perhaps even become our enemies! We may have seen from the first the evil which has caused the change; but we went on hoping that it would be cured. We did not know, for we did not see, how fast it was growing all the while; and in the end it took us by surprise. Blessed be God that this is so, for to our ignorance we owe half the happiness of our lives. But to the Lord Jesus every heart was open, every desire known, and from Him no secret was hid.* From this day He lived with Judas the traitor. With him He shared his daily bread, and every hour, before his searching eye, that evil passion, the love of money, grew in strength till it became the full-grown treason that "sold" his life into the hands of his cruel enemies, who were thirsting even now for his blood.

* Collect before the Communion.

Prayer.

'O thou who art the hearer of prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.' In the still night, when all is silent around us, let the spirit of prayer descend into our hearts, and as Jesus prayed, so let us pray, pouring out our wants and our affections to God our Father. When we have some great thing to do, and lack wisdom, let us come to thee in faith, and thou wilt give us all we need.

We bless thee that thou dost in mercy hide from us what is still to come. O give us such holy and loving trust in thee, that step by step we may be led on through all the changes of life, neither seeking nor desiring any thing but that thy will may be done by us, and in us, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

XVII.

MATTHEW. MARK. LUKE VI. 17, 20.

When the Lord Jesus had chosen and regularly appointed his twelve apostles :

LUKE VI. 17, 20. "*He came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases. And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples,*" (and taught them.)

In this place our Lord Jesus repeated to them the greater part of what He had before said in that long discourse we have already heard, which is called the Sermon on the Mount ; * or it was at this time it was first spoken. As I have told you before, it is not easy exactly to know how day by day the events

* See No. XXXVIII. Vol. I. page 163.

of our Lord's life followed each other.* Blessed be God we have all that is needful for us to know, each word, each deed plainly written, and it matters little whether the one was before or after the other. If the Sermon on the Mount was given at this time, we must suppose that the plain on which our Lord stood was among the mountains, high above the lake and the vallies below; for St. Matthew expressly says, "And seeing the multitudes, Jesus went up into a mountain." (Matt. v. 1.) And that *when there*, He taught the people in the words of that long and beautiful discourse. But this does not create the least difficulty, for these mountains are full of uneven heights, and Jesus may have chosen and appointed his twelve apostles apart, on a height far above the plain to which He came down with them. And that plain itself may have been what is called a table-land among the mountains, looking down upon the shores of the sea of Galilee, and upon its many towns and villages, upon its "cities set upon hills that could not be hid."

At all events, whether our Lord in this place gave the Sermon on the Mount, or whether He only repeated parts of it, the more deeply to impress its truths upon the minds of those who heard him, it is clear that here "He taught the people."

LUKE vii. 1—9. *"Now when He had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, He entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant,† who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That*

* See No. II. Vol. II.

† A centurion—a Roman military officer in command of a hundred men, as the title implies.

Centurions are mentioned, Acts x. 1—22; xxvii. 54. Luke vii. 2—6. Acts xxi. 32; xxii. 25, 26; xxiii. 17—23; xxiv. 23; xxvii. 1, 6, 11, 31, 43; xxviii. 16.

he was worthy for whom He should do this : For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself : for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof : Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee ; but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth ; and to another, Come, and he cometh ; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

MATTHEW VIII. 11—13. "*And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way ; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour."*

LUKE VII. 10. "*And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick."*

St. Matthew tells all this as if the centurion had come himself to Jesus, and in fewer words than St. Luke, who gives a more particular account of all that passed. In common life we often speak of things done for a person, and by their orders, as if they had been done by themselves. When we say, such a man built that large house, we mean that he caused it to be built, not that he built it with his own hands ; and in graver history this sort of language is continually used. We often read that kings built cities, made roads and canals, fought

battles and so on, and we know very well that these things were done by their orders and in their names ; therefore, when St. Matthew in few words tells the story of the believing centurion, it is very easy to see how he tells of his message, as though he had himself spoken it, which indeed he did *through* his messengers. Perhaps he came out in the end from his house to meet Jesus, after he had, through the elders of Israel, and at last through his friends, sent the petition he did not like to offer himself to Jesus, because he felt unworthy to do so. His faith and his humility are beautiful indeed, and even moved the Son of God to admiration. And we do in truth please him best when we feel most deeply, that we are not worthy so much as to offer up a prayer to God, and yet believe that through the intercession of His Son, He will in His own love and kindness give us more than we can ask or think. This centurion was a Roman officer and a heathen. Perhaps, when the commands of his general had obliged him to remain among the Jews, he had wished that any other duty had been given him ; for the Romans despised the Jews, who hated them in their turn, and were continually seeking to throw off their yoke ; but he soon found among this despised people a true religion that could satisfy the deepest needs of the soul. The utter emptiness of all other trust, but in the true God, must have been felt by every thoughtful mind, and we shall find in the history of the New Testament many officers of the Roman army more earnest in prayer, more humble and teachable in spirit, than the Jews, from whose *knowledge* their hope had come. (Acts x. 1—4.) It is not those who *know* most, but those who most deeply feel their need of pardon, who draw nearest to God. This centurion of whom we are reading, had learnt that the conquered Jews were God's people, and no doubt *they* had taken care to impress upon him that *he*, as a Gentile, though he might be received as a convert to the true faith, yet was not, and could not, become one of the children of the favoured family of Abraham. This was a feeling

dear to the Jews ; it fed their pride as a nation, and like every sort of pride, kept them back from the kingdom of Christ. (Acts xiii. 41—49 ; xxii. 21—23.) One of their reasons for hating the religion of Jesus was, that it threw down “ the middle wall of partition ” which divided Jew from Gentile,* and welcomed every nation under the sun into the bosom of God’s family. (Acts xi. 18.)

But the elders, or chief men, (not priests) in the Jewish Church, were quite willing to *intercede* for this Roman centurion with the Lord Jesus, that He should come and heal his servant. They gave as their reason, that he loved their nation, and had shown his love by building them a synagogue. This kind deed of his also showed the REASON of his love. A worldly man would have proved it by seeking favour for them with the Emperor, but this centurion was a religious man, and he proved his love and gratitude to them and to the great God they had taught him to know, by building a place where *He* would be worshipped, and *they* would be taught His will. It is clear that these elders of the Church in Capernaum at least believed that Jesus was able to perform the miracle they asked for. In truth nothing is more wonderful and more fearful than the way in which the greater number of the chief men among the Jews rejected Christ as their Messiah, even while the evidence of their senses convinced them of his truth.

It is as if their words, “ We will not have *this man* to reign over us,” spake the fearful determination,—“ If *this* is all the Messiah we are offered, we will not have him ! ” † Oh, what madness is like the pride of man’s heart !

* That is, it did away with the difference between Jews and Gentiles.

† The fearful words which the German Klopstock in his Messiah, has put into the mouth of Caiaphas, seem but too truly to speak the feelings and the determination of the priests, and of most of the chief men of Jerusalem. And is it not the same now with worldly hearts ! The Jews had expected a Messiah who was to deliver them from the power of the Romans, and to raise up their nation to the height of earthly greatness. They were enraged at the thoughts

Ever calm, and ever kind, "Jesus went with them."

But the centurion, as the Lord drew near to his house, felt more and more the awful sense of his unworthiness, and sent friends unto him to say how unfit he felt himself to enter into His holy presence. He besought him to "speak the word only," and his "servant should be healed." No words of man can express more clearly, more strongly, a perfect faith, a perfect belief in the power of Jesus, than *the reason* the centurion gave for this request.

He knew, he said, that Jesus had only to speak the command and he would be obeyed. And why did he know this ! Because he knew, by his own place, as an officer, himself under the command of those above him, and yet commanding the services of those below him, that a word spoken made obedience sure. "I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof, but speak the word, (the word only,) and my servant shall be healed, for I am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth ; and to another, Come, and he cometh ; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." If I, who must myself obey, have *my* bidding done at a word, how much more thou who, by so many proofs, has shown that thou dost possess the power of God ! Angels and spirits must fly to do thy bidding.* Send to my house one of thy good angels, and he will come. Say unto the disease, of which my servant is even now dying, Depart, and it will be gone.

Humility, faith, and true knowledge of the power of God, can never be better expressed than they were in this message, sent by the Roman officer, one of the Gentiles, whom the Jews thought so far inferior to themselves. "It is not strange to of a Messiah who was to set them free from sins, which they did not believe they had, and to give them the kingdom of heaven, for which they did not care. And is it not true, that many of ourselves feel the same eagerness for the greatness and riches of this world, and the same contempt and indifference for eternal life ?

* Trench on the Miracles.

† Ibid.

read that our Lord himself was filled with admiration." * And we read that—

MATTHEW viii. 10. "*When Jesus heard it, he marvelled,† and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.*"

Then our Saviour spoke a solemn warning to his Jewish followers. Great privileges were indeed theirs, for they were of God's early chosen people, but they must not trust to this, for it was an awful truth that many should be gathered from heathen lands into the family of God, while many of Abraham's own children should be shut out, "because of their unbelief." The centurion's humble, earnest faith, received its immediate reward. "And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick." (Luke vii. 10.)

Perhaps the centurion's earnest love had strengthened his deep humility, so as to enable him in the end to come out to meet his Lord face to face, and that it was to *himself* these words of Jesus were spoken: "Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour." (Matt. viii. 13.)

Prayer.

O holy God, give us more and more deeply to feel our unworthiness to come unto thee with any of our petitions, except through the intercession of thy dear Son, that we may more truly cling to him as our only hope. Thou hast indeed promised to hear the prayers we offer up for each other in the name of thy dear Son, but we bless thee that thou hast given us that Son himself to be our Intercessor, to appear before thee in our stead, and confidently we may plead with thee, "*He* is worthy for whom thou shouldest do this," for He is thine own well-beloved and sinless Son, the brightness of thy glory and

* Trench on the Miracles.

† Marvel means admiration as well as wonder.

the express image of thy person, by whom thou hast redeemed the world. All unworthy as we are, we entreat thee, Lord Jesus, to come into our dwellings, and to abide with us, that every member of our families, each child, each brother, each friend, each servant, may be healed of the deadly disease of sin. And oh grant that we may all of us be gathered into thine own family, and with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, with all who have departed this life in thy faith and fear, may sit down in the kingdom of God, for Christ's sake. Amen.

XVIII.

LUKE VII. 11.

As the morning sun shines brighter and brighter till the perfect day, so, as time went on, did the glory of God, manifested in the person of his Son, shine forth brighter and brighter.

We have heard how, since the beginning of his ministry, the Lord Jesus had healed the sick, and cast out devils ; how all manner of diseases had fled at his touch, and obeyed his word, spoken at a distance ; the time is now come, when we shall hear of greater things than these.

It was wonderful to have healed the sick, to have restored the dying, and many, whose hearts had been trembling in fear for the lives of those they loved, blessed Jesus as the restorer of their happiness. But there is a grief far beyond anxiety and fear. While life lasts in the sufferer, there may be always something of hope, and even when we know that hope is ended, still, while we can soothe, and sustain, if it be only in our arms, there is *life* in our feelings, for there is still something that can be done. But when the living gaze upon the dead, all is ended ; death itself seems to fall upon our powers, and the nothingness of man is forced upon our minds.

The beloved one is gone for ever from our help. In one

hour a gulf has divided us from him, and even in thought we cannot pass it. Thousands and thousands of miles are but feeble words that cannot speak the distance to which we feel the spirit is gone. The most thoughtless, in silence, and alone, cannot gaze upon the dead without these awful feelings of separation. Faith strives to follow the departed spirit, but even religion cannot lessen the gulph that divides the living from the dead. Death, since the beginning, has been a stern teacher of the nothingness of the power of man ; and even the unbeliever must believe that no one *but God can call back the dead.*

The time was come, when this proof, that Jesus was God, was to be given to men, and his voice was now in the hearing of men, to call back the spirit across that fearful gulph—to restore the dead to the living.

Do you remember that when the Lord Jesus was, by a miracle, to give a lesson to the Pharisees that all works for God's glory, in the real good of man, were lawful on the Sabbath-day, He went to the Pool of Bethesda, and chose out, from among many, one friendless man, who for thirty-and-eight years had vainly waited for a cure ? So now, when the great truth that death itself must yield to his command was to be declared, and proved so that no man could deny it, by the raising of the dead, Jesus sought out one family in which death had done its worst.

After He had healed the centurion's servant, He had remained all night in Capernaum.

That night at Nain, a little city about twelve miles off, a widow lost her only son. Jesus knew it. Whether near or far away, every thought of every heart is open to him ; and He knew the crushing sorrow that had fallen upon this widowed mother. Pity for her grief filled the hearts of the people of Nain, and they would show it by following her dead son to his burial ; * Jesus knew it.

* The Jewish burials took place before the sunset in the day after death, often in little more than twelve hours.

LUKE vii. 11—16. “*And it came to pass the day after, that He went into a city called Nain ; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when He came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow ; and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And He came and touched the bier ; and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all : and they glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us ; and, That God hath visited his people.*”

Who can add a word to this ? Do we not seem to see the two crowds meeting at the city gates ? The dead man on his bier. The mother, who sees nothing—knows nothing, but that her only son is stretched upon it, and, *that she is a widow* ? The Saviour, who waits for no petition to draw him to her. Do we not seem to hear his gentle—“Weep not ?” to feel his touch upon the bier ? to hear that solemn word—“Arise,” that called the spirit back ? And do we not seem to share the fear that came on all when “the dead man sat up and began to speak ?” The feelings of the mother’s heart, in its sudden change to an almost impossible happiness, are too sacred, too deep in their awful wonder, their scarce believing joy, for us to dwell upon. We will not follow her on her return to her home with her *living* son, nor attempt to cross with them the threshold over which he had been carried *dead* ; only this shall we picture to ourselves, that both would kneel down before God ; and that the life given to the dead body, would be but the beginning of the life given to the returned soul, and that

Jesus the Redeemer from sin and the grave would be fully shown to the hearts of the mother and the son.

But the crowds without ! What wonder, what amazement filled their minds ! Fear had come upon them all, and they all glorified God for what had been done. All clearly saw that *His power only* could have raised the dead ; but there were two opinions among them. Some said, “ a great prophet is risen up among us,” others said, “ God hath visited his people.” We shall do well to examine these two opinions, for there are still some who look upon the Lord Jesus only as “ a great prophet.” *We* believe that He is “ God who hath visited His people.” Let us look back to the history of the prophets and see whether the greatest among them ever raised the dead by his own power, or in his own name. They did raise the dead, but how ? Elijah, the greatest of the prophets—for he was himself taken up alive into heaven—raised from the dead the only son of a widow, and this was the manner in which the miracle was done. “ He laid him upon his own bed, and he cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, hast thou also brought evil upon this poor widow, with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son ? And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul come into him again. And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah ; and the soul of the child came again into him, and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and he delivered him unto his mother : and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth.” (1 Kings xvii. 19—23.) How like the *circumstances* of this miracle are to those we have just read, of the raising to life the son of the widow at the gates of Nain ; yet how striking is the difference between the prophet’s prayer to God that He would hear his petition that the soul of the child might come into him again, and the command of the Lord Jesus, in one single word, “ Arise.” Who does not see

the difference between the *servant's* and the *Master's* tone? Does not Elijah speak as the prophet? and does not Jesus speak as God?

XIX.

MATTHEW XI. 2—6. LUKE VII. 16—22.

At the gate of Nain two crowds had met. One from Capernaum—for when Jesus left it “many of His disciples went with Him, and much people,”—and one from Nain itself, for when the son of the widow was carried to his burial, “much people of the city was with her.” In the midst of these two crowds the dead man was raised to life, and all saw it, and all wondering, glorified God. Each man carried to his home the story of this miracle, which with his eyes he had seen. All through the country spread the report

LUKE vii. 16, 17. “*That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited His people. And this rumour of Him went forth throughout all Judea, and throughout all the region round about.*”

Still stronger grew the hope among the people, that Jesus was indeed the long-expected Messiah.

The fame of this last and greatest miracle reached the far-off prison in which John the Baptist was confined.*

John had been now nearly a year in prison. It is not likely his own faith in Jesus as the Messiah should have failed him, but it is very likely that he found it hard to convince his followers that their master could have been allowed to languish in prison, if Christ, the King of Israel, had really come. If

* In Macherus, a fortress on the borders, between the dominions of Herod and of Aretas, king of Arabia. See Whiston's Josephus, book XVIII. sect. IV.

Jesus were the Messiah, surely He had power to deliver John out of the hands of the tyrant Herod ! If He really were the long-promised King, why did He not at once take upon himself his kingdom, and set his people free from all who oppressed and afflicted them ? John himself may have been perplexed by the seeming delay, or he may have wished before his own death to attach those men who had followed him, to Jesus, by sending them to him to receive from himself the proof that He really was the long-expected Messiah. It is written—

LUKE vii. 18. “ *And the disciples of John shewed him of all these things.*”

MATTHEW xi. 2. “ *When John had heard in prison the works of Christ,*”

LUKE vii. 19. “ *Calling unto him two of his disciples, (he) sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou He that should come ?—or look we for another ?*”

These messengers from John would have been glad to have found Jesus, as an earthly king, in his court filled with the rich and the noble, or at the head of his armies, fighting against the enemies of Israel.

They did find him surrounded by his court indeed, but it was a crowd of the sick, the poor, and the miserable. They did find him warring and conquering too, but the enemies against whom He fought were Satan and his evil spirits. The distresses from which He delivered his people were all those sad diseases, that long train of troubles that sin has brought into the world.

20—23. “ *When the men (John’s disciples) were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou He that should come ? or look we for another ? And in that same hour He cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits ; and unto many*

that were blind He gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me."

All that the prophets had spoken of the Messiah, John's disciples now saw fulfilled by Christ, before their eyes, and He bade them go, and tell their master, by these signs to know assuredly that He who should come was come, and that to look for another would be wilfully to shut their eyes upon the truth. John had seen the Spirit of God descend upon Jesus as a dove, when he baptized Him in the river Jordan, and by that sign had known and declared Him to be the Messiah, the Holy One of God. And now, that his disciples saw, by the wonders Jesus did, that He was indeed mightier than their master John, who did no miracle, they must not be offended, but rather remember John's own words, when he had told them that his joy was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, whose fame must increase while his decreased. (John iii. 29, 30.)

They must now return to him, and tell him all that they had seen and heard. Then would he indeed rejoice to show them how every word the old prophets had spoken of the Messiah was fast fulfilling. The blind saw, the deaf heard, the lame walked, the dead were raised, devils were cast out from the poor wretches they had tormented; and, to the poor, the gospel—the good news of salvation—was preached. The new kingdom was begun, and blessed should they be who should not be offended in that the Messiah's reign was to be, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." * Blessed would they be if they could see and feel how much better these things were than earthly pomp and greatness.

* See the song of the Angels at the birth of Christ. Luke ii. 14.

Blessed indeed, for, as John had told them at the beginning of the ministry of Christ, they should receive from him the baptism of the Holy Ghost. (Mark i. 8.)

Now, can *we* learn any thing from this message of John, and from the answer given by the Lord Jesus to his disciples? Yes, we may learn much; for the Christian is often placed, in the circumstances of his life, as John was in his far-off prison. The Baptist John had known Jesus; he had seen him face to face, he had been taught by God that He was indeed "He that should come," and that it was useless to look for any other Saviour. But though he knew that Jesus was the Lamb of God, who should take away the sin of the world, the beloved Son in whom God was well pleased, (John i. 29. Matt. iii. 17.) who should (in the end) gather His wheat (that is, His own people) into His garner (heaven) and burn up the chaff (or all wicked people) with unquenchable fire; though he knew, and expected, that Jesus should be preferred before him, and that his own power and influence should grow less, he *now* needed to have his faith and trust strengthened by Jesus himself. He was greatly tried. From his birth he had been bred up in the wilderness. Among rocks and mountains, on the banks of Jordan, as a child, as a youth, as a man, his life had been passed. The wilderness had been his home; the wild fruits his food, his raiment was of camel's hair; and by him God had spoken to the people. He had been a voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight; (Matt. iii. 3.) and all from Jerusalem had gone out unto him, and all Judea, and from the region round about Jordan, and he had baptized them in the river Jordan. There could not be a life more full of happiness to this man of God; it was strengthening to his body, it was cheering to his mind, and his spirit must have rejoiced amidst these desert scenes, over the thousands who came to him to hear the glad tidings, "that the kingdom of God was at hand."

But now! Oh what a change! John was a prisoner. Instead of the wild life of the wilderness, he dwelt within the narrow walls of a fortress. Instead of the free desert air, he breathed the heavy gloom of a prison, and the eager multitude had fallen away. Nothing remained to him but the visits of a few disheartened followers, and they might at any moment be forbidden! Was it any wonder that his spirit was cast down? And though he had known Christ, and did still know him, was it wonderful that some misgivings should cross his mind, and that in his lonely prison he felt so far away that he seemed to be forgotten, and needed the assurance from Christ himself, that he had not been mistaken in believing that He really was He that should come to be the hope of all who put their trust in him? And so he sent messengers to Jesus, to ask that question, upon which so much depended; and they, scarce believing that the man to whom they were sent, and of whom such wonderful things were spoken, was the Messiah, yet went at once, and with their eyes they saw, and with their ears they heard, enough to convince them that Jesus was in truth He that should come, and that there was no need to look for another. "Go, tell John," said our blessed Lord, "what things ye have seen and heard."

He knew how sorely John was tried; He pitied his weakness, and sent him this message of comfort, this assurance that every word that God had spoken of the Messiah was true; and He added besides, a blessing for him, and for all who should not be offended because the Saviour came not to save from earthly trouble,—came not to give worldly greatness, but the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me," but shall believe that all the splendid promises of the Messiah's kingdom are true; though my condition here is lowly, though calmly and quietly I follow my course of mercy and love to mankind, caring nothing for worldly honours, and re-

fusing to place myself at the head of the people as an earthly king.*

Now it is very possible that we, who read these things, may be cast down in spirit, even as John and his disciples were. There are many things that depress the body and the mind, besides the walls of a prison. Ill health—loneliness—the loss of friends—the sudden disappointment of our hopes, these, and even lowness of spirits, that comes we know not how, may be to us what the change from the freedom of the desert was to the Baptist John.

A cloud comes, we know not why, over the brightness of our faith, and even when we most need the comfort of certainty, a doubt rises, a misgiving, that, perhaps, after all, we have fixed our hope, our trust, in what will fail us at the last. Oh, there is no grief like this! It is a dark shadow that wraps the very soul in gloom. For it there is but one cure, to send, as John the Baptist did, to Jesus. Like him we are divided from Him. We cannot see Him; we cannot hear Him. Perhaps even the terrible doubt has come upon us, whether He is indeed the Saviour we had hoped; still let us send to Him, that is, let us take the written word which tells of all He said and did, and on our knees ask for the answer. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; He will send an answer of peace into our souls, He will give us the certainty that He is the only and the sufficient Saviour, and that it were needless as well as hopeless to look for another.†

* Milman's History of Christianity, Vol. i. 231.

† *To those who are really in a prison.*

It is possible that these lines may be read by some, who are like John the Baptist, really in a prison, but it is not likely they are there, as he was, for *well doing*. I fear that, with the sorrows of imprisonment, they must bear the worse grief of a guilty conscience. To them I would say, O do not for this believe that you are shut out from Christ. No walls can hide from him, no bolts, no bars, can shut out his pitying love. He is the same now as He was while on earth. Send then to him a message; ask your minister to pray for you, and

Prayer.

O God, our Saviour, we bless thee that thou art "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" and that in darkness and in doubt we may still send to thee for assurance of thy truth. Thou "dost declare thine Almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity;"* have mercy upon us thy sinful creatures, and when by reason of the weakness of our nature our souls seem to be very far off from thee, and misgivings arise in our hearts, oh, do thou then draw near to us in thy tender love and pity. Send us, by thy Spirit, a message of peace, that our faith may become the brighter for our sorrow; that the voices of the prophets, who told of thee before thy coming; that the wonderful works done by thee, whilst thou wert on earth; and, above all, the change wrought out by thee on our own hearts from the love of sin to the desire of holiness, may all assure us that thou art He who should come, who has come, and who will come again to receive unto thyself all who trust in thee. Amen.

XX.

MATT. XI. 7—15. LUKE VII. 24—28.

LUKE vii. 24. "*And when the messengers of John were departed, Jesus began to speak unto the people concerning John, (He asked them) What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?*"

above all, pray for yourselves. Seek in his word for the assurance of his love and power, and you shall find that He is the very Saviour you need, that He can deliver you from the bonds of sin, that He can heal the sickness of your bodies and of your souls. and that to you who are poor indeed He will make known the gospel, the glad good news of pardon and peace.

* Collect for the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

They had gone in crowds from every part into the far wilderness. Why did they go? Surely they had a reason; it could not be to see the reeds, on the banks of Jordan, shaken by the wind!

They had gone forth in great numbers, as men throng to gaze upon some royal show. Had they expected to find in the wilderness some prince, or some prince's favourite, dressed out in all the finery of a court?

Verse 25. "*What went ye out for, to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they (that wear soft clothing) which are gorgeously apparelled, (finely dressed,) and live delicately, are in kings' courts.*"

They knew that John, whom they went to see and hear, dwelt among the rocks instead of in a palace; that instead of robes of silks and velvets, his dress was of the camel's hair. What was the reason why they sought him? Our Lord repeats the question.

MATTHEW xi. 9—11. "*But what went ye out for to see? A Prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*"

Had they indeed gone in crowds to the far-off wilderness to see and hear John because he was a prophet? If this were their motive, they had done well; for John was a prophet, and more than a prophet. Not only had he foretold the Messiah's kingdom, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and had pointed out the Messiah, the Lamb of God, saying, "*This is He;*" but the prophets of old had foretold John's own coming to prepare the

way for his Lord.* It was John of whom the prophet Malachi had written in the words our Lord repeated to the people—"Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee." The Lord Jesus repeats these words as a promise from the Father to the Son, while the words of Malachi, spoken by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are, "before *my* face," "before *me*," the Father speaking of himself. In this manner did the Lord Jesus show that He looked upon himself, the Son, as one with God the Father, and that with them *mine* and *thine* had the same sense. †

As for John, he was the greatest *man* that had yet been born; greater than all the prophets, than all the holy men that had been before him; but nevertheless, Jesus added, that the least in the kingdom of God was greater than he. Did this mean that the least of those who had already passed into glory was greater than the greatest who yet remained on earth? This is, no doubt, true; for can the knowledge, or the happiness, or the holiness, of the wisest and best on earth be equal to that of the youngest child, or of the most ignorant man or woman already in heaven?

But there was another meaning, and it concerns us who are still in this world to know it. It is this, that (great as John the Baptist was) the least of those who were called upon by Jesus to establish His kingdom on earth were greater than he, because they were more fully taught by the Spirit of God, and to them were revealed those things the holy men of old had desired to understand, but never had fully understood.

Yet more; the very least, the very humblest, Christian now has greater advantages than John the Baptist had, for he can look back upon the Messiah's finished work, and know as-

* John the Baptist filled up the space between the Covenant in the Old Testament and the Covenant in the New Testament. He made, as it were, the link that fitted on the one to the other. See Olshausen, Vol. iii. 57.

† See note in Scott's Bible on this verse.

surely, that He ever liveth to make intercession for him at the right hand of God. Romans viii. 34. Hebrews vii. 25.

The Lord Jesus had much more to say concerning John. These are his words :—

MATTHEW xi. 12—15. “ *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*”

With the ministry of John the Baptist the old prophets ended and the New Testament began; the gospel, the good news of pardon and peace, was first opened, and men were led to the Saviour by his preaching “the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins,” (Mark i. 4.) and by his pointing out to them Jesus “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world :” (John i. 29.) But while the men of the world neglected John’s warning voice, many of those who might rather have been expected violently to seize men’s goods than to care for the things belonging to religion, were so moved by his preaching, that they, with great earnestness, pressed into the kingdom of heaven, coming from all parts to be taught by the Messiah. Thus the kingdom of heaven might be said to suffer violence, and the violent to take it by force. “All the prophets and the law prophesied until John,” and the very last of the prophets, in the closing words of the Old Testament, foretold John’s coming as the prophet Elias, or Elijah. . . . The Lord Jesus solemnly adds, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear ;” and solemn indeed must this warning have been to the Jews, who all knew, if they chose to remember, the awful words of that prophecy spoken by Malachi. “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord : and He shall turn the heart of the fathers

to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." (Mal. iv. 5, 6.) Elias or Elijah was come! The great and dreadful day of the Lord was surely at hand, and unless the families of the earth were united in the Messiah's kingdom they would be smitten with a curse. Awful words were these, the last words of their Bible, the Old Testament, but not more awful than true; for dreadful indeed was the day that fell on Jerusalem. Awful the curse that smote the nation, and from that curse none escaped but those who had received Jesus as their Lord and their Redeemer. *We* have seen these things. We have seen come true all that the prophets have spoken, not only concerning John the Baptist, but all concerning the Messiah and his kingdom. We know how fearful was the doom that fell upon Jerusalem,* and we have in every land living witnesses of the punishment that still pursues the nation that knew not its day of grace, but rejected their long-looked-for Messiah. The voice of every Jew still unwillingly tells *us* to beware how *we* allow to pass unheeded the time of pardon and of peace. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Prayer.

'Almighty God, who didst send thy servant John the Baptist to prepare the way of thy Son, our Saviour, by preaching repentance; give us grace so to follow his doctrine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching.' † Grant that our minds may be so awakened to watch and to understand the fulfilment of the prophecies, that we may see in all the events of the world the guidance of thy hand; and as the signs of the second coming of our Lord are given, O let us not be slow to learn, but let us, taught of thee, prepare to meet

* About forty years after this time, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans with a fearful destruction, and those Jews who remained alive, were afterwards sold into slavery, and dispersed through all lands.

† Collect.

him. O holy Spirit of God, descend into our hearts, and turn away from us, and from our native land, the doom of those who might have known the truth, but closed their eyes and ears against it :—For Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

XXI.

LUKE vii. 29, 30. “ *And all the people that heard Jesus, (thus speak concerning John the Baptist) and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.*”

The common people, and even the publicans, who were many of them bad characters, “justified God,” that is, confessed His justice in that punishment of sin which John had taught them to expect. (Matt. iii. 10—12. Luke iii. 7—9.) They felt their need of repentance, of pardon, and of a change of heart and life; therefore they had been ready to listen to John's preaching, and they now willingly agreed in all the Lord Jesus had just spoken of John. But the pharisees and lawyers, in the pride of their hearts, despised the warnings they had received. They believed themselves righteous, and they had refused to be baptized of John, therefore they were displeased with all our Lord had said of him, because if John were right, then they were wrong; and thus they put from them the way by which they might have been saved. It is just in this way that men are apt to pass over those parts of the word of God which they think would interfere too much with their good opinion of themselves, and with the lives they choose to live. Oh let us take care that it is not so with ourselves! “The counsel of God” is, that we may see how terrible a thing sin is, how en-

tirely it will, in the end, shut us out from happiness for ever, and seeing and feeling its evil, that we may gladly turn to the Saviour provided for us. Let us anxiously and carefully watch over ourselves, that we may be not of those who, through pride of heart, make this counsel of our God to us of none effect.

Our blessed Lord was full of earnest desire to rouse up a sense of their danger in those who turned away from him. They had refused to listen to John the Baptist; they now refused to listen to him, the Messiah, who had been pointed out to them by John, and, that they might see the folly into which their pretended wisdom brought them, He said unto them :—

LUKE vii. 31—34. *“Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the market-place, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.”*

There could be nothing more likely to bring these pretended wise men to a sense of their folly than this comparison. The Lord Jesus shewed them, as in a picture, what they were like. They were like quarrelsome children who were met together in the market-place to play, but who could not agree what was to be their game. If some of them proposed the merry music of a wedding, the others would not dance. If some of them thought to make a pretended funeral, mourning and lamenting in imitation of the hired mourners at a burial, the others would not join with them. In short, no game, whether grave or gay, could please them; and why? What was it that

hindered them? It was their hour of play,—it was the place where they often amused themselves; what then was wrong with these children that they let the time they might have to enjoy themselves, slip by, and lost it all in useless disputes? It was *they themselves* that were perverse and quarrelsome. It was their temper that was wrong, and the men who stood by could easily see this; but they did not see that *they were themselves like these perverse children*. They would not heed the preaching of John the Baptist, who had called to them from among the rocks in the wilderness, clad in camel's hair, and practising a life of hardship and self-denial; and they would not hear the preaching of Jesus, who kindly came among them, seeking out in their families, in their places of public meeting, and even at their feasts, all who would listen to His lessons of love, to his offers of mercy; healing the sick, casting out devils, and showing the repentant sinner the way into the kingdom of God. To neither would they listen. John, they said, was "possessed by a devil," who no doubt drove him into the wilderness, and made him melancholy mad. Jesus, they said, "was a winebibber, (fond of feasting,) and a friend of publicans and sinners!" Awful blasphemy! and yet too truly the language of discontented and perverse hearts, putting the blame of sin upon those things that God has sent upon us, instead of upon our own wilful and rebellious spirits. The Pharisees were allowing their day of grace to pass from them; let us see that we are not doing the same. One says 'I live in a town, or I live among so many people, that I cannot attend to the things of religion;' another says, 'I am so alone, I never see or talk with religious people, it would be such a help to me if I had religious friends, and for want of this I cannot go on in the ways of holiness.' Some complain that they have so many other duties, that their whole time and thoughts are taken up by them; others complain, that they really have few or no duties at all, and that this makes it very difficult for

them to live a really religious life. O let all of us believe that the fault is, not in our circumstances, but *in ourselves*. That our lot in life is our path of duty, and that there is not one of us who may not live to God, *if he will*. In every thing, in every sorrow, in every happiness, a voice calls to us from the pages of the Bible in the words of John the Baptist, to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, for the axe is laid at the root of the tree, and every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire, (Matt. iii. 8, 10.) and in the words of the Lord Jesus, "Search the scriptures," for "they are they which testify of me;" (John v.) "these things I say unto you that ye might be saved:" "Come unto me and ye shall find rest unto your souls:" "Take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy, and my burthen is light." (Matt. xi.)

The time is passing by. Let us use it for the purpose God gives it.

Let us examine into our hearts and lives. Let us search and see whether the sin of the men of the generation in which Christ lived on earth is not also our sin. Whether we do not throw on others the blame that is due to ourselves.

The Lord Jesus having shewed to the Scribes and Pharisees, who had refused to listen to John the Baptist, and refused His teaching also, that they were like perverse and quarrelsome children, added these words:—

LUKE vii. 35. "*But wisdom is justified of all her children.*"

Though *they* might lose the time that was given them for repentance in self-willed murmuring and disputing, the truly wise would see and own God's wisdom in all His dealings with them. They would bless him for his warnings and reproofs. They would bless him for His comforts and tender loving-kindness. In sorrow, and in joy, in all His works, and in every place they would bless the Lord.

Prayer.

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name : who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with tender mercy. (Psalm ciii.)

Thy loving-kindness is better to me than life, therefore my lips shall praise thee. (Psalm lxiii.)

“ Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.”

In sorrow and in joy I will praise thee, my God, for all that thou hast done is well done. In sorrow thou hast shown me comfort in thy Son, my Saviour; in joy, O let me not forget thee. Thou art good, but I am evil. Perverse and foolish, my heart turns away from thee, and the precious time is hastening on. Eternity will soon be here. O God, have mercy on thy rebellious child; give me to hear and heed each warning word of thine.

“ Give me a heart to love my God,
A heart from sin set free,
That I may always feel the blood
So freely *shed for me*.
Give me a heart submissive, meek,
My dear Redeemer's throne
Where only Christ is heard to speak;
Where Jesus reigns alone.”

In His name I ask it, O my God. Amen.

XXII.

MATTHEW XI. 21—30.

The Lord Jesus, having shewed how great was the perverse folly of all those who had refused alike to listen to him, and to the Baptist John, went on to show them how great was their sin, and how great would be their punishment.

Never, since the world began, had there been a place so favoured as the country round about the Sea of Galilee. There the Lord Jesus had spent by far the greater part of His time ; and it was there, that miracles without number had been wrought, and the kingdom of heaven had been freely offered to all. Yet it was but a few among the crowds, who followed him from place to place, that truly joined themselves to him to receive from him a new heart and a new life. By far the greater numbers wondered at him for a while, and then, turning from him, remained given up to a life of careless sin.

Perhaps, from the place where our Saviour stood, at the time He was speaking, He could see the city of Capernaum, where He chiefly dwelt, and the towns of Chorazin and of Bethsaida, both of which lay within a few miles of it. He lifted up His voice as if calling aloud to them, and well might the inhabitants of " these cities, wherein most of His mighty works were done," tremble, even while they crowded round him, as they heard His awful words.

MATTHEW xi. 21—24. " *Woe unto thee, Chorazin ! woe unto thee, Bethsaida ! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell : for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.*"

Solemnly and awfully must these words have sounded through the listening crowd, and along that fertile shore, where Capernaum, a busy city full of men, and the smaller towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida, lay smiling in the sun. Their day of doom was

at hand. The presence of the Son of God might now have made them like heaven itself. The hour was hastening on, when so utterly would these cities be destroyed, that the traveller would ponder over a few scattered stones, and wonder *where* they stood.*

The cities themselves were but streets and houses; it matters little that low mounds of ruins are all that at this day remain for us to guess at, but *where* are the men, who, in their madness and their pride, refused to listen and to heed, when the Son of God stood among them, bringing heaven down to earth, raising the dead, and healing all manner of diseases by a word? Alas! we are not left to guess at their doom. The Saviour, He who came to save all who would be saved, has said that it is "woe" intolerable. The men who heard the Lord Jesus speak, knew that every word the prophets had foretold, of the utter ruin of ancient Tyre, once the most flourishing city in the world,† had come to pass, because "that iniquity was found in her," and her heart was lifted up with pride because "of her beauty and her riches." (Ezek. xviii. 5.) They

* See Robinson's Biblical Researches, Buckhardt, &c.

† Ancient Tyre. The richest and strongest commercial city that the world contained in the early days of its history. It stood on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, about half way between Egypt and Asia Minor, near the north western side of Palestine or the Holy Land. The time when it was built is not known, as it was before any of our secular histories began; but it is believed to have been a city 200 years before the days of king Solomon; and the prophet *Isaiah* in foretelling her ruin, speaks of "her antiquity" as "of ancient days." He calls her "the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth." Isa. xxiii. 7, 8. Tyre was a colony from the still older city of Zidon. The prophecies against Tyre are very remarkable for their number and distinctness—and every one of them has been fulfilled in every particular. It was at first built upon a rocky hill on the mainland; but having been vainly besieged for five years by the same king of Assyria who took and destroyed Samaria, the people of Tyre, for greater safety, in case of another invasion, made a stronghold on a small island about half a mile from the city. This stronghold, in time, became the principal city, and that on the mainland was called *Palaio Tyrus*, or old Tyre. The strength, and riches, and pride of

knew she had been "brought down to the dust," and that the place which had been a city of palaces, was now bare as "the top of a rock, a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea." (Ezek. xxvi. 4.)

They knew that the glory had long since departed from the still more ancient Zidon ; * and that where Sodom once had stood, the most flourishing of the cities of the plain, the Dead Sea now rolled its dismal waves—all this they knew, and acknowledged that the punishment was just. What then should they have felt when they heard that a heavier woe was to fall upon themselves because of their deeper guilt ?

Tyre were known all over the world, and its manufactures were so beautiful, that every king coveted a robe of Tyrian purple. While its glory was at its height, the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel pronounced God's doom against it : "That it should be overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," Ezekiel xxvi. 7—13. "That it should be forgotten for seventy years," Isa. xxiii. 15. That it should revive and become again a wonder and a glory, but that at length it should be destroyed, and never rebuilt. All this has happened word for word as the prophets have spoken, and, so minutely has each verse been fulfilled, that there is no more curious and satisfactory study of the prophecies of old times, than to compare these with the events in history by which they were fulfilled. Ezekiel had said, "They shall lay thy stones, and thy timber, and thy dust, in the midst of the water." Ezek. xxvi. 12. And 332 years before Christ, Alexander for seven months vainly besieged Tyre, the city on the island, but being unable to land his soldiers upon it, he at length took the ruins of old Tyre, and throwing them into the sea, built with them a mole or narrow passage from the mainland, across the dividing sea to the island, which he took and utterly destroyed by fire. And then were these prophecies fulfilled at once, "that the dust, the timber, and the stones of ancient Tyre should be laid in the midst of the water." That it should "be sought for, yet should never be found again." Ezek. xxvi. 21. And according to the words of Zechariah ix. 4., that "Tyre should be devoured with fire." The younger city of Tyre was partly rebuilt, though it never again became of importance, and in the year 1291 it, at the end of the crusade of that period, was finally reduced to a heap of rubbish by the Moslems ; and Tyre has indeed become "like the top of a rock," "a place to spread nets upon." Ezek. xxvi. 45.

* "The still more ancient Zidon." This city is supposed to have been built by Sidon the eldest son of Canaan, the grandson of Noah. Even in the time of Joshua it was called "great Zidon." Joshua xix. 28.

A few, a very few, among them were warned in time, and, with hearts humbled by the sense of sin, sought and found safety in Christ the Saviour : but all the proud in heart, all who were wise in their own eyes, turned from him, as they had turned from the Baptist John. They ran their course, and all that Christ had spoken came upon them, and upon the cities wherein they dwelt, the very names of which are now forgotten by the strangers who dwell in their land.

MATTHEW XI. 25—30. *“ At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father ; for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father : and no man knoweth the Son but the Father ; neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart ; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burthen light.”*

It has ever seemed good to the Father, Lord of heaven and earth, to give the teaching of His Holy Spirit to all those who humbly and earnestly look up to him to be taught, even as the little babe meekly and anxiously looks up to its mother for the milk which she alone can give, and without which the babe must die.

And it has ever seemed good to the Father, Lord of heaven and earth, to leave the proud and worldly-minded, who in their conceit reject the doctrines of the Saviour, to their own folly, which hides from them the simple wisdom of the Gospel. And therefore Jesus glorified God because these things which were hid from the great ones were revealed to babes.*

* Jeremy Taylor.

And who is it the Saviour calls ?

All who "labour and are heavy laden," no matter what is the labour, no matter what is the burthen, ALL who feel the need—the wish for rest, may go to him. "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Will you hear and refuse to heed ? Has worldly care bound you with its chain ? Has disappointment vexed your soul ? Oh ! more than all, has the feeling of your sin bowed you down with its heavy weight ? Does grief of any sort lay its load upon you ? Hark ! the Saviour calls to you, "Come unto me and I will give you rest." Go then to him, and bless him that you *feel* your burthen, *whatever* it be—that you feel the desire to be rid of it ; for the greatest of all misfortunes is, to rest satisfied with our own power to help ourselves.

All, every man and every woman in the whole world, as they pass out of the first bright years of youth, more or less feel that life is not what they expected it to be. Some believe the cause to be in one thing, and some believe it to be in another, but no one discovers the real cause, and the only cure, but those to whom God makes these things known.

The sin that is in us, and around us, with all the sad consequences that sin has brought upon the world and upon all things in it, *is the cause* why life is a vain search after a state of good that cannot be found in it : and *the cure* is to believe this ; and for each person, with humbled heart, to take meekly and willingly his share of the burthen that is common to all, remembering how meekly and how willingly Christ bore that burthen of suffering for his sake. Whoso believes this, and remembers this, will find rest and peace to his soul, for disquiet comes from self-will struggling to raise itself up, in spite of all hindrances, to a happiness quite independent of God. This is the yoke of the world, and a heavy yoke it is, and all who bear it find life to be one continual disappointment. But the yoke that Christ invites us to share with him is easy, for He helps us to bear it, and so takes away the weight from

the burthen of grief that life must bring. "Learn of me," said the blessed Saviour, "for I am meek and lowly in heart." It is not the worldly-wise who will so seek to learn from Christ, nor is the knowledge He gives, that which men call learning. It is to be found in no book but in the Bible, and even in the Bible we cannot find it unless taught of God, for "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." Would you then receive from Jesus, the Holy Son of the Holy God, that learning which will "give rest unto your soul? Hear and heed his words: "Come unto me, *all* ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." All—not one, but all, He invites to come, and He has further promised, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." And how are we to go to Christ? Surely in earnest prayer—so "shall ye set your affections on things above, not on things of the earth,"* and so shall peace possess your souls.†

XXIII.

LUKE VII. 36—38.

The words of the Lord Jesus sank deep into the hearts of some of those who heard him.

In that crowd there were men of the world, "wise and prudent" in their own eyes. They could not endure to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was their long looked-for Messiah, yet

* Col. iii. 2. The whole of this chapter, and the first half of the next, shows how completely the lesson taught by the Spirit of God, will indeed give rest from the *struggle* of life, by raising those who are willing to learn of Christ above the slavery of self-will, sinful desires, and worldly wishes. Whoever with earnest prayer will take these lessons for their guide through life, will certainly find "the peace of God rule in their hearts, and will be thankful." Col. iii. 15.

† Collect for the twenty-first Sunday after Trinity.

the mighty deeds He wrought, and the solemn words He spoke, made some impression, and they resolved to watch him still more closely. Of these, Simon,

LUKE vii. 36. "*One of the Pharisees desired him that He would eat with him, and He went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.*"

And in the crowd who had been listening to the words of Jesus, there were the weary and heavy laden—those who *laboured* under a burthen of sin and sorrow. *They* had heard his tender words of kindness and of pity. They had heard him invite them all to come unto him that they might have rest; and there were some on whom the invitation was not lost. Of these there was a woman of the city whose life had been so openly bad that all men knew her to be "a sinner." None but God, to whom all hearts are open, knew that the thought of her sinful life had become to her a heavy burthen, that the yoke of Satan was hateful to her, and that the words of the Lord Jesus had brought new hopes and new life to her wearied heart.

A known sinner, despised by all, but by none so much as herself, how could she make known her repenting, grateful love? Could she venture to follow Jesus into the Pharisee's house? The manners and customs of the people of the East are now, and always have been, so different from ours, that it is needful for us to know something about them, in order clearly to understand what we read in the Bible. In the history of our Lord, we shall find that many times He sat down to eat in the houses of those men, whether they were his friends or not, who invited him to do so. We shall also find mention of the feasts, or private entertainments given by the Jews among themselves; and it will be well in this place to understand, once for all, what was the difference between their manners and ours. Unless at a wedding-feast, or an occasion of great ceremony, the Jews often had their tables laid in the

open courts of their houses, and in their gardens. There was no difficulty for strangers to enter; and at this day, in the countries of the East, all sorts of people are seen hovering about the gardens, and even entering the houses of a rich man when a feast is going on.* But wherever the tables were laid, it was in a manner very different from ours. Instead of chairs, there were placed round each table couches or sofas, that were called dinner-beds, and on these the guests lay at full length, each one leaning on his left elbow, so that he might help himself with his right hand from the dishes placed before him on the table, which was always lower than the dinner-bed.† At the end next the table was a bolster or pillow to lean upon, and the other end, on which lay the foot of the person upon it, was turned away towards the wall, so that people might pass round behind these beds or sofas.

On the first entrance of a guest he was always refreshed with water for his feet and his hands. This was not only an act of civility, but of needful kindness, in a country where the heat and the dust were distressing, and where people wore only sandals, which did little more than prevent their feet from being hurt by the hardness of the ground, without in the least keeping out the dust. It was, besides, the custom to sprinkle sweet perfumes upon each guest, and to anoint his head with scented oils. All these were marks of respect, as well as of

* See Forbes' Oriental Memoirs.

† Triclinium. These dinner-beds were usually arranged for three persons to recline upon each one. It is most probable that the Jews learnt this effeminate custom from the Persians during their captivity, Esther i. 6; vii. 8. It had been long the custom of the Greeks before it had become that of the Romans. (See Biblical Cyclopædia—Accubation.) Where in the New Testament we read the words "*sat down to eat*," they should more properly be *lay down*. The usual shape of the table was three sides of a hollow square, thus . The open end leaving room for the servants to pass in and out with the dishes.

Knives and forks and spoons were not known. People helped themselves by dipping their hands into the dish before them.

kindness; but they were not offered to the Lord Jesus by Simon the Pharisee. He invited him indeed to his table, but the only notice he took of him, when there, was to observe him more closely, in the hope that he should be able to see something in his conduct which would prove that He was not, and could not be, the Messiah. He was "wise and prudent" in his own eyes, and the things belonging to the kingdom of Christ were hid from him; but they were made known to one who felt that she was as ignorant and as unable to help herself as a little babe.

LUKE vii. 37, 38. *"And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster-box of ointment,* and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with ointment."*

The sinful woman wept. Her heart had been hard, but as the warm sunshine melts the ice, so the kind words of the Saviour had reached her heart, and its hardness melted away into tears of sorrow for her sin, of tender grateful love to him, who, all heavy-laden as she was, had bidden her come to him that she might have rest. She wept—and oh how relieving to the full heart, to the burthened soul, are the tears of repentance when shed at the feet of the Saviour! This woman, by God's mercy, had been awakened from her dream of thoughtless sin. Perhaps she had long groaned under the yoke of Satan; but whether it had been before, or whether it was only now, that

* At Alabastron, a town in Egypt, there was a manufactory of small pots and vessels for holding perfume, which were made from a stone found in the mountains near the city. The name Alabaster was given to the stone from the name of the city, and vessels made of it were thought to be particularly good for keeping costly and powerful perfumes.

she had found Satan to be a hard master, she longed to be freed from his service, and to learn of Christ. Her repentance drew her to him, and she wept with the fulness of a softened heart. that knew its sin, and had found its cure.

She came behind the Lord Jesus ; behind the couch on which He lay, as was the custom of the times ; but she found that He had been neglected,—that no water had been given him to cool his feet, or to wash away the dust. No sweet perfume had been offered to him to anoint his head, for Jesus in the Pharisee's house was not an honoured guest. Stooping over these sacred feet, she washed them with her tears, and wiped them with her long hair. She did not dare to come nearer that she might anoint his head, but she had brought with her a box of perfume—such as in the days of her vanity she had used for her own hair—and, kissing his feet, she anointed them with it. Long and beautiful hair was the thing that was most admired among the Jewish women, and great pains and much expense were given to make it beautiful, but this woman no longer cared for beauty. She knew that she had been a sinner. She had found the Saviour, and she thought only how she might best show her love and gratitude.*

Now, thought the “ wise and prudent ” Pharisee, now I have a proof that Jesus of Nazareth is not and cannot be the Messiah. Even if he were a prophet, if he were taught by God at all, he would have known what is the character of this woman, and he would have driven her from him. It is written—

LUKE vii. 39. “ *Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him ; for she is a sinner.* ”

* If this number is here divided, it will be necessary to read from the 36th to the 39th verse, before beginning the second part.

The Pharisee thought but of the sin—he forgot the value of the sinner's soul.

He did not speak aloud, but Christ hears the voice of every thought as it rises in the heart ; and He shewed the Pharisee, in a moment, that He was far more than a prophet, that He could read his inmost thoughts as plainly as though they had been spoken aloud.

LUKE vii. 40—47. “ *And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors ; the one owed (him) five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most ? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman ? I entered into thine house ; thou gavest me no water for my feet : but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss ; but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint ; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven ; for she loved much : but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.*”

It was the belief among the Jews, that to be able to discern the secret thoughts of other men was one of the marks of a true prophet, and that this would be especially one of the signs that would point out the great Messiah when he came among them.* The Pharisee supposed that the Lord Jesus was so entirely without this gift, as not even to know the character of the woman who had come so near him ; in a moment he was

* Trench on the Parable of the Two Debtors, p. 301.

shewn that not only her heart, but his also, was open to His searching eyes.

Very little love had the Pharisee shewn to the Lord Jesus, and very great was the love shewn by the poor penitent sinner. The reason of the difference between them Jesus explained in a manner usual among the people of the East, by a short story full of meaning. One man owed five hundred pence, another owed fifty. Neither of the two could pay at all; but the one who owed the most felt that his case was the worse of the two, therefore his gratitude and joy would naturally be the greater when both were excused the debt.

This Simon the Pharisee saw and acknowledged; and when the Lord Jesus asked him which of the two would most love him who forgave them the debt—he answered immediately, “I suppose that he to whom he forgave most.” “Thou hast rightly judged,” said the Saviour. And turning to the weeping woman who stood behind him, He pointed out the great difference between his love and hers. He indeed had asked Him to his house and to his table, but he had not offered Him one single act of kindly welcome, while she had done all that was in her power to prevent her Lord from feeling this neglect. He had not even shewn him the kindness and respect that it was the custom to offer to all, while she had done much more, for she had washed His feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair—once her pride and glory—and had anointed them with precious ointment. What was the reason? Simon the Pharisee, well pleased with himself, thought his sins were few, that he owed little, but the woman knew and felt the bitterness of her sin; she was crushed by the feeling that of her great debt she had nothing to pay, and her love to him who freely forgave her all was great indeed. “She loved much;” but the Pharisee who thought he had only need for a little to be forgiven, “loved little.”* Then when Jesus had ended the parable, and had shewn its meaning, He spoke unto the woman;—

* Read with attention 1 Cor. i., from verse 18 to the end.

LUKE vii. 48, 49. "*And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also ?*"

The Lord Jesus took to himself the character of the creditor in the parable, making the sinful woman one debtor, and the self-righteous Pharisee the other, and He claimed the power of freely forgiving them both. This made a stir among the other guests. "Who is this," they said, "that forgiveth sins also?" We are not told that Simon was one of them who thus spoke. Perhaps he began to see that this Jesus was indeed the Messiah, who knew his secret thoughts and answered them on the spot, who allowed there was a difference between him and an open profligate sinner, and yet shewed him that he too had need of a free pardon, or he could never be saved; for unless forgiven, he must remain in debt—he had nothing to pay.

The Lord Jesus left the lesson to work within him, but made haste to comfort the penitent sinner, to send her back to her home, as full of joy, as she had left it full of grief.

LUKE vii. 50. "*And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.*"

Her faith had brought her to the Saviour's feet, and there, from him, she had found pardon. Well might she go in peace. "Heavy laden," she had come to him, and He had given her rest. From this time she was no more to serve sin and Satan. She had taken upon her the yoke of Christ, which was easy, His burthen, which was light; for the loving heart which He gives to those who learn of him makes His service delightful. She might "go in peace," for she had found rest unto her soul. Matt. xi. 28—30.

And the Pharisee! What became of him? We know not; but from his want of love to the Saviour, we learn that to have a good opinion of ourselves, to think that we owe but little, is

a far greater danger than even the weight and burthen of sin, provided we long to be freed from it, provided we go to the Saviour to learn of him how to find rest, and pardon, and peace.

Prayer.

O my Saviour and my God, I owe thee a great debt of obedience, of love, and of faithful service, but I have nothing to pay, for my nature is unclean, and I cannot serve thee as I would. All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, (Isaiah lxiv. 6,) when compared to that holiness of heart and life which become thy children. Teach me this ; impress upon me the greatness of the debt I owe thee, that I may seek thee with earnest desire to hear from thee that thou dost forgive me all. O let my love be great as my sin and danger, great as thy free mercy, and as the salvation thou hast wrought for us. "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways." (Isaiah lxiv. 5.) And I would serve thee with gladness of heart, for thou art my Saviour and my Redeemer. I would remember thee at all times, and in all places, in sorrow, and in joy. I would serve thee with the best of my substance, in thankfulness of heart. Much has been forgiven me, O grant to me thy holy Spirit, that I may love thee much. Amen.

XXIV.

MATTHEW IX. LUKE VIII.

After this the Lord Jesus made another circuit, that is, he went round through the towns and villages of Galilee. St. Matthew says—

MATTHEW ix. 35. "*And Jesus went about all the cities*

and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people."

St. Luke says—

LUKE viii. 1—3. "*And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve (apostles) were with him, And certain women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene,* out of whom went seven devils, And Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.*"

Wherever He went, He carried with him blessings for the souls and bodies of men. For our sakes He had become poor—He had nothing of his own—"for ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor; that ye through his poverty might be rich." 2 Cor. viii. 9. And many of those to whom He had given blessings to the soul and blessings to the body, were glad to shew that they "loved" him "much" by going with him, and providing for his wants, and the wants of his disciples out of their abundance.

It is pleasant to see, that among the pious women who did this, was Joanna the wife of Chuza, king Herod's steward. There is no place from which the word and power of God can

* Many have supposed that Mary Magdalene was the woman we have just read of, who had been a known sinner, and who washed her Saviour's feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair; but there is nothing in Scripture to prove this, and much that seems to prove them to be quite different persons. It is not likely that one who had been of known bad character should be the companion of respectable women, particularly of the wife of an officer of rank in Herod's palace. This Mary was probably called Magdalene, from Magdala, a town in Galilee, which was most likely her native place.

be shut out ; and, amidst the dangers and temptations of the court of the tyrant Herod and his wicked wife, the gospel of Jesus Christ had reached and changed the heart of Joanna.

She is named among "certain women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities," therefore we may believe that some bodily distress had fallen upon her, and that this was the means of bringing her acquainted with Christ the Saviour. How often this is so ! How often do we see those who are rich in this world's goods, unable to enjoy any thing because of constant illness ! And this very illness is the greatest blessing of all. Without it they would have been worldly-minded, proud, and vain ; but God in this way teaches them how entirely they are in his hands, and fixes their attention upon his holy word, to which they would not have listened, had they not so much needed help and comfort ; and in this way they are, like Joanna, made ready and willing to follow Christ, and to minister "unto him of their substance." The Saviour is gone from earth, but his cause still remains, and we who have received from him so many blessings for our souls and bodies, are still called upon to shew our grateful love by forwarding his work in every way we can. He is now at the right hand of his Father's throne ; but the gospel of his kingdom should still be preached in every city and in every village. Still disciples of the Lord Jesus go into far-off places, among our own people in the Colonies, and among the heathen, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. Every where this work has been helped forward by pious women, who have given up their time and their talents, to the work of spreading the knowledge of Christ among those who knew him not.

In the accounts that year by year come home of all that is doing in these distant lands, we read of women teaching in the schools, of Missionaries' wives who share in all the labours and anxieties of their husbands, and thus we see that there is still in Christian hearts the spirit of grateful love that made

Mary, called Magdalene, and Joanna, and Susanna, and many others, follow Christ and his disciples to minister to their wants.

Few women are called upon to leave their homes, and to go into foreign lands to help forward the cause of Christ. Nothing but a *clear case of duty* ought to make them do so, for they should remember how plainly their usual line of duty is pointed out in God's word, where St. Paul in giving the character of Christian women, says, that they should be "keepers at home;" but at home they may help forward the cause of Christ, they may spread the glad tidings of his kingdom among the poor, the young, the ignorant. If they are rich, they may give of their abundance to help those servants of Christ, who are sent into far foreign countries to spread the glad tidings of His gospel, and who, like their Lord, have nothing of their own of this world's riches. If they are poor, they may still of their poverty give a little—and how greatly is that little blest! Perhaps nothing would astonish the poor so much as to know the greatness of the sums of money that are raised by the pence they give, and surely it must cheer the Christian man and woman, who of their hard-earned wages spare a little to the cause of Christ—to know that they are joining with Him in overcoming the kingdom of Satan and in bringing back into the family of God this fair world and all that are in it. This is the cause for which Christ lived and died. Great as it is, even little children can help it forward, and many would be surprised to know the quantity of money that every year is sent abroad, to help the Missionaries, from the small stores of little children. Surely the blessed Saviour, who accepted, for himself and His disciples, the assistance of those pious women that followed him, will kindly smile upon the grateful love of a little child, who spares from his pleasures that he may give something to help forward the cause of Christ his Lord. This cause must be dear to every heart that has felt the power

of his tender loving-kindness. Oh let us all join together to minister unto him of our time and of our substance.

Prayer.

O blessed Lord, we are weak and feeble creatures : give us that willingness of heart, that devotedness of spirit that shall make us rejoice in every opportunity, in every means, of helping forward thy kingdom.

Thou didst create the world and all that is in it by a word, and by a word thou couldst establish thy kingdom ; it is of thy goodness and love to thy children, that thou dost condescend to use them as instruments by which thy work is done. Grant that in every city and village, in every lonely dwelling, the glad tidings of the kingdom of God may be preached, till thy promise is accomplished, that “ the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea,” (Hab. ii. 14.) for Christ’s sake. Amen.

XXV. ,

MATT. XII. 22. MARK III. 19. LUKE XI. 14.

The Lord Jesus returned to Capernaum, and there He met with a greater and a more trying persecution than before. Now, his friends as well as his enemies seem to have been against him. Some of his relations appear to have believed, or to have pretended to believe, that He was out of his senses. It is written that on his return He and his followers

MARK iii. 19—21. “ *Went into an house. And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard of it, they*

went out to lay hold on him : for they said, He is beside himself."

The word which we here read "friends," means also kinsmen,* and we know from another place that some of his brethren did not believe on him. These kinsmen of our Lord were alarmed to see how the people crowded round him, and how night and day, at home and abroad, He laboured on, not giving himself so much as time to eat bread. Perhaps they were also afraid of the anger of the chief priests, and of the rulers of the people, and thought that the whole family might be made to suffer for his sake. They tried to excuse him and themselves, by declaring that He was out of his mind ; and to show how truly they believed this, they sought to lay hold of him that they might persuade, or oblige him by force, to give up his work, or at least to carry it on differently. We find in the word of God (1 Cor. i. 19.) this verse, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent," and so it was with the pretended wisdom of the kinsmen of our Lord ; their plan, which no doubt they thought extremely prudent, came to nothing. The Lord Jesus was not for a moment to be stopped or hindered in carrying on the work which God his Father had given him to do. He seems to have taken no notice of these attempts of his friends ; but calmly went on to show by word and deed that the power of God was in him.

MATTHEW xii. 22—24. *"Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb : and He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David ? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils."*

* See margin of the Bible.

We read before that the common people heard the Lord Jesus gladly, but that the Pharisees rejected the counsel of God against themselves, and we see that this still went on. The people, amazed at His wonderful works, asked, "Is not this the Son of David?" by which they meant the Messiah, the long-expected Prince of David's line, whose "name shall be called Wonderful," (Isaiah ix. 6;) but the Pharisees, filled with envy and with fear at the power they saw the Lord Jesus was gaining over the minds of the people, tried to turn their admiration into hatred. They took advantage of a superstition that had long been believed among the nations of the East, and which we find in many of the tales and histories which come from these countries, that men, by using magic, might make a bargain with the Master Demon, by which he might give power over the inferior spirits who were his servants. These magicians were wicked men, who used the unlawful power which people believed them to possess, for unlawful ends; and when the Pharisees said, "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils," their impious words were just such as would make the superstitious and ignorant crowd start back from him in affright.

The answer of the Lord Jesus was, like all his replies to these proud and angry men, divine in its calm simplicity, and awful in its godlike power. The Pharisees had not dared to speak to himself, but had whispered their wicked thought about among the people.

MATTHEW xii. 25—28. *"And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your*

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judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you."

Ever since the beginning, a great struggle had been carried on. On one side there was Satan attacking and destroying the happiness of men. On the other side there was God restoring it, and providing for it. God, as the Almighty, no doubt could have ended this strife as soon as it began, and chained Satan down from the beginning, or cast him at once, as we know he shall be cast in the end, into the lake of fire for ever. (Rev. xx. 2, 10.) And this is, no doubt, what we should have thought the best; but man's wisdom is but foolishness with God. We must remember our world is only a part of God's universe; we do not know how much the happiness of all His great family may be affected by the sight of this awful struggle between the powers of Good and Evil.* If one son rebels against a Father's authority, listens to an enemy, and suffers himself to be tempted from his home, surely it is well for the rest of the children of that family to see that their brother, in yielding to the tempter, has only lost his happiness, and gained nothing but misery! When they see that there is no other way for him to be happy again, but in submitting to his father's will, and returning to his home, his error confessed and forgiven, surely their love of that home will be strengthened, and their trust in their father's wisdom will be greater, because they have seen it proved that, to dwell in his love and in his family, is the only real happiness.

When we wonder why God permits the war between good and evil to go on so long, let us remember how short-sighted we are, how little we know of the affairs of all God's great family, of which we are only a part!

But this war goes on, and the Lord Jesus came into the world as the great Captain of our salvation, to give the promised deadly wound to Satan's power. (Gen. iii. 5.) How then

* See Vol. I., p. 196.

should Satan himself assist him? The answer of the Lord Jesus struck the Pharisees with confusion. They themselves believed that Satan and his evil spirits delighted in the miseries and crimes of men, could they suppose that he would fight against his own cause, and join Jesus in casting out his evil spirit from the minds and bodies of the miserable men whom they tormented? Would Satan thus cast out Satan? Would the spirit of evil join Jesus in doing good? They knew this to be impossible. They knew besides, that they believed some of their own nation to have the gift from God of casting out devils, and why were they to judge differently of Him? * Why not,

* It seems to be clear from several parts of Scripture, that some of the Jews by faith in help from above, were enabled to perform this wonderful cure of freeing those who were possessed with devils. In the ixth chapter of St. Mark at the 38th verse, we read of one who cast out devils in the name of Jesus, though he was not one of his disciples, and had been given no commission to do so. Yet the Lord Jesus would not allow him to be hindered, saying, "for there is no man that can do a miracle in my name that can speak lightly of me." We also read in Acts xix. 13. that "certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits, the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "we adjure thee by Jesus, whom Paul preacheth," but that the evil spirit, instead of obeying, caused the man whom he possessed to leap upon them furiously, so that they were glad to escape for their lives. There seem to have been before the time of Christ, and after it, men who, in faith of God's help, attempted to drive out devils from the possessed, and did succeed in doing so, and men who made a trade of the superstition of the ignorant people, and pretended to have power over evil spirits. Both classes seem to have been called exorcists.

It is easy to see in the writings of Josephus, the great Jewish historian, that much superstition was mixed up with the Jewish notions of evil spirits, and of their expulsion, yet this does not prove that there is no truth at the bottom of the thing itself, with which many falsehoods may be joined. See Olshausen on the Gospels, Vol. II. p. 97. It was believed by the Jews, that one of the gifts of wisdom bestowed by God on king Solomon, was the knowledge how to cast out devils, and that he left the secret of this knowledge behind him, when called away by death. In the viiith book, 2nd section, of Josephus's Antiquities, there is a most curious description of the manner in which he declares that he himself saw a devil cast out by a man of the name of Eleazar, in the presence of the emperor of Rome, and he adds to his account—"when this was done, the skill and wisdom of Solomon was shewn very manifestly ;

in common fairness, believe that the far greater miracles which He performed were done as theirs were, by the power of God ? "Therefore they shall be your judges." But the Lord Jesus cast out devils in His own name and by His own power, for the Spirit of God was His own Spirit, and He warns them that they would be wise, instead of going farther and farther into sin by their hatred to His doctrines, to learn from His mighty deeds that the kingdom of God was begun among them.

[*Read again from Matt. xii. 33, where this number is divided in the reading.*]

Jesus said unto them :—

MATTHEW xii. 28. "*But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.*"

His meaning He explained by a parable which is full of instruction. The words of this parable as they are in St. Luke are these :—

LUKE xi. 21, 22. "*When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace : But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.*"

for which reason it is, that all men may know the vastness of Solomon's abilities, and how he was beloved by God, and that the extraordinary virtues of every kind with which this king was endowed, may not be unknown by any people under the sun ; for this reason, I say, it is that we have proceeded to speak so largely on these matters."

It is curious to trace in the various tales that have come from Persia, and Arabia, and other countries of the East, this same belief, that the name of king Solomon has power over demons, called by them Genii. It is probable that, like most superstitions, this belief has grown out of a simple truth, but has been so added to and disfigured, by man's inventions, that the first simple truth is nearly lost in the multitude of the added falsehoods. There is nothing improbable in the idea that God, among his many gifts of wisdom, bestowed upon king Solomon the gift of healing those possessed by evil spirits.

MATTHEW xii. 29. *“ Or else, how can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man ? and then he will spoil his house.”*

In this parable we are taught that Satan, having taken possession of this world as his house or palace, looked upon the souls and bodies of men as his goods. How awful, how fearful the thought ! Satan, as “ a strong man armed ”—armed with all the powers of darkness, with temptations by which he works on man’s weakness ; with sin, by which he raises up a host of evil passions in his breast ; with fear, by which he so works on sinful men that they despair of pardon—armed with all these dreadful powers, Satan, the strong man, thought to keep his dominion over his house and his goods in peace. But blessed be the Most High God, this his kingdom of darkness, of sorrow, and of sin, was not to last. In the very hour when Satan took possession of the world as his own, when, through the weakness of the woman, he claimed her and her children—the whole race of man, as his property ; in that very hour the decree went forth that he should not continue to enjoy his unlawful dominion in peace ; that there should be a constant struggle between the good and the evil, and that at last a seed of the woman, stronger than he is, should overcome him and destroy his power.

The hour was come, “ the stronger than he,” had appeared ; Jesus himself, the seed of the woman, born of a virgin, had entered the strong man Satan’s house, and all now could see how the struggle had begun ; for the power of Satan was fast giving way before Him, and that struggle shall never cease till the kingdom of God, brought by Christ into the world, shall entirely be established. No day passes over our heads without, if we think of it, our being reminded of the terrible truth that Satan looks upon this world in which we dwell, as his own ; and that, through the weakness and wickedness of men, he is strong

to do evil. From him came "the wars and fightings" that fill the earth with woe; for he stirs up the evil passions of men against each other, and he rejoices to see that they still "desire to have, and cannot obtain." (James iv. 12.)

But blessed be God, this shall not last. The promise is express—Christ, the "stronger than he," has already overcome him; he no longer keeps his goods in peace, for in some degree he is already bound. Wherever the religion of Christ is the religion of a nation, the cruel and barbarous spirit which makes men delight themselves in deeds of savage cruelty is drawn out, and nothing is more striking than to mark the difference between the laws of Christian nations and the customs of the heathen kingdoms of the earth. It is true that much goes on, even in Christian nations, which tells that Satan still struggles for the mastery; but among the heathen, his rule is complete, the strong oppress the weak, and the weak have none to help them; revenge is believed to be a virtue, and the blood of man is shed without hesitation, if one stand in the way of his fellows. This shall not last. In the end Satan, the strong man of sin, shall be completely bound, so that he shall "deceive" and oppress "the nation no more," (Rev. xx. 3, 10,) and "the armour wherein he trusted" shall be taken from him, for he shall lose all power to tempt mankind to their destruction.

This parable of the Lord Jesus may be said to have in it the history of the world; the time past, the time present, and the time to come. We know that Christ shall reign, and that the time shall come when all shall willingly serve him. It is written, "In the day of thy power shall the people offer thee free-will offerings with an holy worship: the dew of thy birth is of the womb of the morning, (Psalm cx. 3,) for the birth of Christ was as the first ray of the morning sun, that shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day, driving away all darkness, till in the end His kingdom of light be established.

The Lord Jesus, by His parable of the strong man armed,

who kept his palace, and his goods were in peace, till a stronger than he overcame him,—shewed to the Pharisees and to the people who might have been misled by them, that in casting out devils He was plainly binding Satan and destroying his power; therefore there was no sense in the wicked pretence, that He used Satan's power to do His mighty works. He adds a warning to all the Jews, who, as God's people, should have been on His side in the struggle with the strong man of sin; and to the Scribes and Pharisees in particular, who, as the teachers of God's people, should have been the first to see and acknowledge God's truth. This was the warning He gave, and it will be well if *we* also take heed to it.

MATTHEW xii. 30. "*He that is not with me is against me : and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.*"

By these words we are taught that, if those, whose appointed duty it is to teach the people, do not lead their minds and affections to Christ, they are leaving them in the power of Satan, and are doing all they can to hinder the kingdom of God.

Prayer.

O God, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that thou, being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal. Grant this, O heavenly Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord,* who hath bound the strong man of sin, so that he can no longer keep in peace the dominion over our hearts. Save us from his power, save us from listening to the temptation of the evil one, and let thy Holy Spirit rule in our hearts and minds, so that we may have "a right judgment in all things, and evermore rejoice in his holy comfort."† Amen.

* Collect for 4th Sunday after Trinity.

† From Collect for Monday in Whitsun week.

XXVI.

MATTHEW XII. 31. MARK III. 28. LUKE XII. 10.

The Lord Jesus knew, and had answered the wicked thoughts of the Pharisees. Gently and kindly He had reasoned with them, shewing them that it was impossible that Satan, the spirit of evil, would join Him to do good, and to destroy His own kingdom of darkness. Now He speaks to them in words of solemn warning. Their hatred to Him, and to the lessons of holiness He taught, had led them even to such a point of wickedness, that wilfully closing their eyes against the truth, though it was proved to be truth by such wonderful works as God only could perform, they tried to force themselves and others to believe that these very wonderful works were wrought by the devil himself. Jesus warns them to beware. As yet all should be forgiven ; and all that the blindness of their rage against him, the Messiah, should lead them still to do, He would forgive ; but let them beware. They were not ignorant even now ; they should be still more fully taught, and let them beware *how* they received the ministration of the Holy Spirit, which shortly would be given to the world. Let them take heed that they received not His ministry with taunts and blasphemies, as they had received the Son of man, or no more hope would remain for them.

MATTHEW xii. 31, 32. *" Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men : but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him : but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."*

This warning was spoken by our Lord in solemn kindness to the Pharisees, who were coming very near a point in wickedness, which if they passed, they would become hardened to all repentance, and thus be lost for ever. All the wise and good men who have written on this subject, seem to have agreed that to warn these Pharisees was the meaning of our Lord: and St. Mark himself adds, "Because they said He had an unclean spirit."

This warning, so kindly and so solemnly given by our blessed Lord to the Pharisees, to stop, before their rage against him should so harden their hearts, and blind their eyes, as to make it altogether impossible that they should ever be received into the kingdom of God, has been made by many a trembling believer a cause of great fear and anguish of soul. Many, very many, have been tempted to believe that they have committed this dreadful sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and that they could not hope for pardon, and so they have gone on for a time in mourning and misery. Yet their very fears and grief are a sign that they have not so sinned against the Spirit of God as to cause him to leave them; for had He left them, they would have known nothing of this sorrow and self-upbraiding. "Whoever grieves himself with the notion that he may have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, proves already by his grief, and by his readiness to accuse himself, that he has not done so,"* for then would he have been dead to all such feeling. He who is given up by the Holy Spirit, can feel no more sorrow for sin. The dead man cannot lament that he is dead, neither can he who has sinned away the Holy Spirit of life from his soul, lament his deadness in sin. Let each mourner who weeps over these words of our Lord, think of his loving-kindness, of his tender pity. He spoke them, awful as they are, in kindness, for He would save, even these, His bitter enemies, from blindly rushing on their own destruction.† Will He be

* Olshausen, Vol. II. p. 107.

† St. Chrysostom, when speaking of this warning of our Lord to the Pharisees,

less kind to you? Humble thyself, O sinner! before Him for thy sin, whatever it be; fix thy thoughts upon serving Him better, "so shalt thou be able to obtain pardon for thine offences, and to win the promised good things; whereof may we all be counted worthy by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might for ever. Amen." *

The Pharisees set themselves up as the teachers of the people. They knew the law, and they liked to be thought patterns of religion. Why did not their thoughts and their words agree with their characters? The Lord Jesus said unto them:—

MATTHEW xii. 33. "*Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.*"

All *He* said and did agreed with His name and character. He said that He was the Messiah, that God was His Father, and the wisdom, the mercy, and the power of God, shone forth in every word and deed. The Pharisees prided themselves upon being the children of Abraham, the servant of God, how did *their* words and deeds agree with their name and character?

Verses 34, 35. "*O generation of vipers! (said our Lord) how can ye, being evil, speak good things! for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things: and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things.*"

who had accused him of casting out devils by Beelzebub the Prince of the devils, says; that "many of those who said these words believed afterwards, and all was forgiven them." Now, St. Chrysostom was born about 350 years after the time of Christ, and it is fair to suppose that the histories of many of the first Christian converts might then be known, though, in the 1500 years that have passed since, they have been lost and forgotten.—See translation of Chrysostom's Homilies on St. Matthew, Part II, 582.

* Ibid: 585.

They showed what they were by their words and deeds, a brood of vipers. The venomous viper will sting the hand that raises, and the bosom that warms it ; and so they, the Pharisees, in return for all the kindness God had shewn to their nation from the beginning, were striving against His holy religion, and against His Son. They had indeed the name of being God's people, for they were born from the children of Abraham, and they set themselves up as teachers of the people, but their hearts were full of pride and falsehood ; how could they then, being evil, speak good things ? It was impossible. To do this, their nature must be changed. They were indeed, being Jews, as trees planted in God's vineyard ; but they were by nature of a bad stock, and therefore they brought forth bitter fruits. There was a way to help this. A new nature might be grafted on the old, and the tree and its fruits might become good. The religion of Christ might be grafted on the old Jewish stock, and so the fruits might be good, for the heart would be changed, and as "the tree is known by its fruit," so would this change be known by the words they spoke. Little heed we give to the sins of the tongue, but this is an awful mistake. Listen to the Lord Jesus, and remember that not to the Pharisees only, but to us also He speaks.

MATTHEW xii. 36, 37. *"I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."*
(See Rom. viii. 1.)

We are called Christians. In our baptism we were received into Christ's visible church, we were as trees, planted in the Lord's vineyard. What are our fruits ? Are our lives holy ? Does our conversation show that we are his ? Having named the name of Christ as our Lord, do we depart from all iniquity ? (2 Tim. ii. 19.) Let us look to this. We do not enough dwell

upon the high privileges of our Christian baptism. In it we were solemnly given to our God, received into his vineyard. What are the fruits we bring forth? Are they worthy of the name by which we are named? Are they indeed Christian? Oh let us know no rest till Christ's own holy nature has been grafted in our hearts; then out of the abundance of our hearts shall our mouths speak His praise, and out of the good treasure of the heart shall good things be brought forth. To this blessed end let us fervently pray.

Prayer.

Lord of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things. Graft in our hearts the love of thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

XXVII.

MATTHEW XII. 33.

Before we go on to another subject, it will be useful for us to consider well these important words of our blessed Lord.

MATTHEW xii. 33. "*Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.*"

So is the man by his actions—He who *feels right* will be sure to *do right*.

Many a lesson in religious knowledge may be learnt in the field and garden.

What can be more harsh and useless than the fruits of the

* Collect for 7th Sunday after Trinity.

wild crab-apple; yet let the tree be transplanted into a garden, and let the branch of a good apple-tree be grafted upon it, its whole nature is changed, it bears excellent fruit, and becomes of value, repaying the trouble that has been taken with it!

So is it with man. In his natural state he is as the wild crab-tree; his thoughts, and words, and deeds, like the fruit of the crab, are bitter, harsh, and altogether worthless. It was not always so—the first man dwelt in Paradise, and in that garden all the trees were good and their fruits were good, but when the blight of sin fell upon Adam and his children, the ground was cursed for his sake, then much labour and toil was needed to bring forth any good. But not even labour and toil will change, though it may improve, that evil nature that came with sin. Education will do much for man, and cultivation will do much for the wild crab-tree; but the nature of both must be changed before either can bring forth any good. The heart of man must be entirely changed before he can really glorify God by a holy life; and this can only be done by his being as it were made one with Christ. And herein is God's wisdom and mercy shewn. He gave His Son, the Lord Jesus, to take upon him our nature, that He might raise it back again to the state of holiness from which it had fallen; and He promises his help to do this in all the means of grace, but chiefly and above all in the Holy Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; by which, if duly and rightly received in deep repentance and in earnest faith, we are received back again into the garden of the Lord, and we have a new and holy nature, even the divine life of Christ, grafted into our hearts, so that we may bring forth the fruits of holiness, even as the crab-tree transplanted into good soil, with the branch of a good tree grafted into it, will bring forth fruit sweet and good. But this is not all that we may learn from the wild crab-tree. Each gardener knows, that even after it has been transplanted and grafted from a good tree, yea even after it has borne much

good fruit, he must watch it diligently, for leaves and branches from the old bad stock are always growing, and, if they are not carefully pruned away, their wild growth weakens the plant, so that the good fruit becomes less and less. He knows that if these wild bad shoots were suffered to remain, they would in time check and altogether destroy the good branch, and all that had grown from it of good. In this we read a solemn lesson. Even though the new nature, the holy nature of Christ Himself, may have been grafted in us, and by his power we are enabled to bring forth good fruits, yet our sinful nature remains, and struggles hard for the mastery. As the gardener must watch and prune away each shoot from the old bad stock, so must we carefully watch, and diligently strive to prevent, the growth of the evil that is natural to us—all pride, and angry temper, and strife, all vanity, selfishness, and covetousness, all lusts and envyings and self-indulgences, all evil thoughts and wishes are shoots from the old bad stock. (Gal. v. 19—21.) They must be watched and pruned away, and they must be the more carefully watched, because they are apt to cheat us by sometimes in the beginning, looking very like what is good, even as the leaves of the wild crab-shoots are in some degree like the leaves of the good branch—but “by their fruits ye shall know them.” The history of the world, both as written in the bible, and in other books, is full of sad examples of good men falling into fearful sins, and we may almost always see how the *beginnings* of evil might have been checked. Had David turned away his eyes, and watched the first thought of his heart when he looked upon Bathsheba for the first time from the top of his house, he would never have committed adultery and murder.

I have spoken of the apple-tree and its parent stock the wild crab, because in this country it grows in great abundance, and in almost every cottage-garden there are grafted apple-trees. But in the countries further south, the olive takes the place of

the apple. In Syria, which we call the Holy Land, the country where the Jews dwelt, the olive grows in great abundance, and St. Paul, speaking of the bringing in the Gentile or Heathen nations to the Church of Christ, makes use of the figure of *grafting*. He represents the whole Church of God under the figure of a good olive-tree, into which both Jew and Gentile must be grafted, or they cannot be counted as holy. (Rom. xi. 16—24.

Thus in every garden we may read the deep mysteries of God, who seems to explain to us in the things we see, the manner in which His Spirit works in the hearts of men. We cannot graft trees of different natures together. The wild briar may, by grafting, be made to bear the beautiful garden-rose, as the hard and sour crab may bring forth the sweetest apple, and the wild olive-tree the richest and best of olives; but the fig-tree cannot be made to bear olive-berries, neither a vine figs. (Jam. iii. 12.) The rose cannot be grafted on the thistle, nor the fruit-tree upon the thorn, each, to do any good, must be joined to one of its own species or kind. The good branch must be of the *same nature* as the wild tree on which it is grafted. The difference between them must not be in *the kind*, but in the goodness. It must be in this, that the branch which is grafted on the wild stock, is a perfectly good branch of a perfectly good tree. Every gardener knows this and acts accordingly. And thus did the Great Husbandman.

The nature of man had by sin been corrupted at its very root. It could not produce any good fruits—that is—holiness of thought, of word, and of deed, were impossible to men in their natural state of sin. But God in his great mercy determined to give back to men their first estate in which Adam had been created, that he might be fit to serve Him on earth, and to dwell with Him in heaven; and for this purpose He gave His own Son the Lord Jesus Christ to take upon Him our flesh, and to be born of a woman, that in Him our fallen human

nature might be as it were grafted into the Divine nature, and so be made able to bring forth good fruit.

The prophets who wrote of Christ, many hundred years before He came, called Him "The Branch." (Zech. iii. 8 ; vi. 12.) And whoever will compare what the prophet Zecharias has said of "The Branch," with what is said by the other prophets, especially with Isaiah xi. will see how true are the words of Jeremiah, when he calls the promised Son of David "A righteous Branch," "The Lord our righteousness." (Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.) He is indeed "our Righteousness," for it is only by the Holy Spirit we receive *through* Him, that we can do any thing that is right; besides which, it is only through His righteousness, His perfect obedience, that we can be accepted as righteous in God's sight. Even as the wild tree is worthless, and can bring forth no good fruit, but from the branch, perfect and good, which is grafted upon it. When the tree is made good, then is the fruit good; and when man is regenerated, or made a new creature in Christ Jesus, then he is able to bring forth fruits that are pleasing to God. And let us remember that "the fruit of the Spirit" is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. (Gal. v. 22, 23.) These are tempers as different from the evil passion natural to the sinful heart of man, (Gal. v. 19—21,) as the sweet and good fruit of a good branch is different from the sour wild fruit of the wild stock on which it is grafted.

Let us well consider this, and every time we stop to watch the growth of a grafted tree, or to gather its fruits, let us look to ourselves. Let us make sure that Christ is grafted in us, and that our words and deeds show the new nature we receive from him.

Every time we stoop down to prune away a wild shoot from the old stock of the grafted tree, let us look to ourselves. Let us take pains to keep down, to get rid altogether of the evil tempers and wishes of our old bad nature. Let us do all we can to "make the tree good, and its fruit good."

Prayer.

O God, we are weak and worthless branches, sprung from a worthless root, corrupted by sin from the very beginning. We are unable of ourselves to bring forth any fruit that is good; yet in our baptism we have been planted in thy vineyard. Received into thy church, we have by thy mercy been grafted upon thy good olive-tree, and thou dost look for the good fruits of obedience and of love. O have mercy upon our unfruitfulness. Give us that grace, that strength which we can receive from thee alone, so that we may "walk worthy of the vocation with which we are called," "that we may present our bodies a living sacrifice unto God, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service." So shall we by thy grace bear fruits worthy of "the Branch," who is "the Lord our Righteousness." Amen.

XXVIII.

MATTHEW XII. 38. LUKE XI. 29.

The Scribes and Pharisees could not gainsay the wonderful works that Jesus wrought. The dead were raised, the sick were healed, evil spirits were cast out, and they could not deny it. Their wicked attempt to persuade men that He was in league with the Devil, and was able to do these things only by the power of the Evil One, had been shown to be utter folly, as well as dangerous and fearful sin.

It seems that while some of them whispered about :

LUKE xi. 15, 16. "*He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils ; Others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven.*"

And now when they found they had only brought disgrace, and reproof, and solemn warnings upon themselves, by their false accusations of the Lord Jesus,—

MATTHEW xii. 38. *“Certain of the Scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.”*

Not a sign, such as the miracles wrought upon the earth, and belonging to things and people they were used to, but something quite different—“A sign from heaven.”

Verses 39—42. *“But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon: and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”*

The Scribes and Pharisees had found that their attempt to make the people believe that the Lord Jesus was a magician,—one to whom Satan had lent his power, had only brought disgrace upon themselves; they therefore once again changed their plan, and pretended to treat him with respect. “Master,” they said, “we would see a sign of thee.” The word which is put into English as *master*, means much more than we mean by that word. Among the Jews it was used, as teacher, leader, guide, and always meant to express a learned man. Therefore when the Jews called Jesus “Master,” they meant to express

that they were willing to be taught by him. Jesus knew their hypocrisy, and in his answer showed that He knew, not only the present wickedness of their hearts, but the dreadful end to which their obstinacy would bring themselves and their nation. He called them an "evil and adulterous generation." By the word "generation" is meant all the people that are alive at one time. Our grandfathers, and those who lived in their time, and with them have passed away from the earth, we call the past generation; and our grandchildren, and those who with them will fill our places when we are gone, we call the future generation. When the Lord Jesus said, "this is an evil and adulterous generation," He spoke of his countrymen who were then living. "Evil" they were, as they too plainly showed, but why did He call them "adulterous?" There is in this a deep and solemn meaning. We shall be wise to think well of it, to take it into our hearts, to act upon it through our lives. The children of God are as it were *married* to His religion. They have taken holy vows upon them that they will be His. They owe to God, the faith, the love, the glad obedience, a wife owes to her kind indulgent husband, who has loved her, and cared for her, and watched over her from the beginning. This is the case with the whole universal Church—with each one person in it, and whoever, forgetting God, gives their affections and their services to any other, is committing spiritual adultery against Him. This is very awful, but it is true, and the scriptures are full of passages in which the Church of God is described under the image of his betrothed wife. We shall find the unfaithfulness and ingratitude of the Israelites shewn forth in Ezekiel xvi., under this figure, and that they should be judged "as women that break wedlock." In St. James iv. 4, those people who set their desires upon the things of this world, are warned in these solemn words, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" And in Rev. xix., the faithful family of God is

welcomed to His heavenly home, under the figure of the Bride, in these words, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him : for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."

We see then that we are, *each one of us*, married, as it were, unto God's religion. His vows are upon us, we cannot be rid of them if we would. Born in a Christian land, baptized into the Church of Christ, we receive from him all the loving help, all the guiding care, all the rich gifts that the wisest and kindest husband could bestow, and we owe to him the devoted love, the cheerful obedience, the undivided affection, which is expressed in the marriage vow. It is an awful and yet a blessed thought. Awful, because fearful is the doom of the unfaithful ; blessed, because it shews us that all who love their Lord are sure of his help, his protection, his guiding love, in the time of their mortal life, and that in the end He shall dwell with them, and be their God for ever. (Rev. xxi. 2—4.)

Well might the Lord Jesus, in speaking to the Jews who surrounded him, call them an evil and adulterous generation. God had, as a nation, wedded them to himself—how had they returned his love ? He had chosen one family from the whole world, guided, guarded, and instructed them, to bring them to repentance for sin. He had chastened them as a man chasteneth his own son whom he loveth. He had comforted them in sorrow, He had strengthened them in weakness, He had restored them when destruction had seemed ready to fall upon them, and what was now their return ? Were the men of that generation, devoted to the service of God, humble and holy in heart, as might well be expected of the children of Abraham, and of those who God had thus tenderly cared for up to that time ? Alas ! No. They were an evil and adulterous generation, and in the pride of their sinful hearts, they rejected the last and greatest proof of his love, the gift of his own, and only Son to be their Saviour.

Prayer.

O God, our Saviour, have mercy upon this generation in which we live. Great have been our mercies, great are our present blessings. When thou wert on earth, our native land was in heathen darkness, our forefathers were half naked savages. But thou didst have pity upon us. Thou didst send thy messengers of truth to declare thy gospel of peace and love, and even as the darkness gives way before the rising sun, so the heathen cruelty and ignorance of our fathers gave way before the light of thy truth. Blessed be thy name, thou didst build thy church amongst us, and though there has been sin within and sin without, it never shall be shaken, because it is founded upon the rock of truth. We are wedded unto thee by the holy vows that are upon us. O give us grace to watch "with godly jealousy," lest our "minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." (2 Cor. xi. 2, 3.) "Remember not, Lord, our offences, nor the offences of our forefathers ; neither take thou vengeance of our sins : spare us, good Lord ; spare thy people whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood, and be not angry with us for ever." "Endue us with the grace of thy Holy Spirit, to amend our lives according to thy holy word." * Amen.

XXIX.

MATTHEW xii. 39, 40. "*An evil and adulterous generation (said the Lord Jesus) seeketh after a sign ; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas : For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly ; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*"

* See Litany in the Book of Common Prayer.

No sign from the heavens should be given them, and yet upon the earth, even in the earth, a sign was soon to be given ; the greatest, the most wonderful of all ; but they, that evil and adulterous generation, would close their eyes, and shut their hearts against it, so that it would but increase their guilt.

"No sign," said our Lord, "shall be given, but the sign of the prophet Jonas ;" and lest they should mistake the part of the prophet's history that was like the sign that should be given them, He immediately points it out to them. "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." This is the second time, (John ii. 19—21.) our Lord shewed beforehand his knowledge of his death, his burial, and his rising again on the third day, that sign by which we know that we also shall rise again. (1 Cor. xv. 20—22. It was not to be expected that those who stood around him now should understand his meaning ; and had He more openly said that after his death and burial He should rise again, they would have laughed him to scorn ; but he spoke in such a manner, that, when the time came, they might remember his words, and believe upon him. We shall see that they did remember them ; (Matt. xxvii. 63,) but, alas ! so wilful were they in their determined hatred, that they remembered his words only to sin the more, and bring upon themselves a greater condemnation.

That we may more fully understand the meaning of our Lord when He said to the Pharisees, "there shall no sign be given but the sign of the prophet Jonas," let us take a few minutes to think over the history of Jonas. (Jonah i. to the end) He was sent by God with a message of warning to Nineveh ; but instead of obeying, he went on board of a ship that was bound for a far off land, that he might, as he foolishly thought, "flee from the presence of the Lord."

Who can escape from his anger ? Who can disobey him

and be safe? The Lord God sent a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was like to be wrecked, and the mariners* were afraid, and at their wits' end. When they knew that it was because of Jonah this evil had come upon them, and found from himself that while he was among them the sea would not cease from raging, then "they took up Jonah and cast him forth into the sea," and the storm ceased and there was a calm.

"Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows." (Jonah i. 16.) But what became of Jonah? "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights," (Jonah i. 17.) that is, he was there what the Jews reckon three days, which is a part of each of three days, beginning in one day, and ending in the third.

Though the prophet Jonah had been disobedient to God, yet his faith was strong, and from the depths of the sea, he cried unto the Lord, and He heard him; and "He spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." (Jonah ii. 10.) Then the prophet arose, and went to Nineveh, and he obeyed the voice of the Lord, and cried aloud unto the people of that great city, that the Lord would no longer bear with their wickedness, and that the time of their punishment was come. But when the people of the city, and their king, heard that, they were filled with fear, for they believed the message God had sent, and they repented them of their sins, and turned unto the Lord; and He had pity upon them, and turned away His anger from them, and forgave them their sin, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah.

Now let us consider what our Lord meant when He said to the Scribes and Pharisees, that the only sign which should be given them was the sign of the prophet Jonas; for as he was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so should the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

* Sailors.

There was no other way of saving the ship and the men that were in it, but by throwing out Jonah into the sea ; so that He was a sacrifice for sin ; but the sin *was his own*. It was because *he* had disobeyed God that the storm came upon the ship. Christ the Lord was also to be a sacrifice for sin, but not for sin of His own ; for He was perfect and without stain. Yet without His sacrifice, the world, like the ship, could not be saved from the tempest of God's wrath, and therefore He took upon him the nature of Adam, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, that, being delivered up unto death, "he, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man, and deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Heb. ii. 9—15.) When Jonah was "cast forth into the sea," it ceased from raging. There was a calm, for the storm was gone as soon as Jonah had sunk into the depths of the sea, where he lay, men thought, to rise no more, buried as in a tomb till the third day. And when the grand sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ was finished, the tempest of God's wrath on a sinful world was hushed, for the debt of sin was paid ; and as, after a night of storm, the morning sun rises bright and clear over the calmest sea, so the glorious light of the Holy Spirit arose upon the world, to send knowledge, peace, and comfort into the hearts of believers.

When the men in the ship saw that after they had cast Jonah forth into the sea, the waves ceased their raging, then they "feared the Lord exceedingly," and when those who stood by the cross of Christ, saw the terrible things that were done at the moment of his death, "they feared greatly." (Matt. xxvii. 54.) But neither the men in the ship who cast out Jonah, nor the men who crucified Christ, knew, that, though buried out of their sight, the one in the deep sea, the other in the silent grave, both should rise again ; that through the preaching of Jonah, Nineveh, that great and sinful city, should for a time be saved from ruin, and that Jesus should become "the author of

salvation unto all them that obey him." They did not, they could not know it then ; but *we* know that " Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many ; and unto them that look for him shall He appear the second time, without sin unto salvation." (Heb. xi. 28.) Yes, *we know* what the sign of the prophet Jonah would have spoken to the men who stood around the Saviour if they had but *wished* to know ; if, instead of closing their ears, and hardening their hearts against the voice of their Lord, they would have listened to his words, and asked his help to understand them. *We know*, because, from our early childhood, we have been taught that for our salvation Christ died and rose again ; but are we sure that this knowledge has sunk into our hearts so as to *direct our lives* ? Are we sure that we " give the most earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we shall let them slip ; " for " how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ; " (Heb. ii. 1, 3.) so kind, so complete, so clear a way of safety from the punishment our sins have justly deserved ? " The sign of the prophet Jonah " has been fulfilled in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, who pointed it out to the attention of the Scribes and Pharisees ; but have we not, like them, turned carelessly from it ? The heathen mariners, when they saw the sea cease from raging the moment Jonah was cast into it, " feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows." (Jonah i. 16.) Has the death of Christ the Lord, for our sakes, had as serious an effect upon us, as the casting out of Jonah for their sakes had upon these poor heathens ? Let us not pass from this question without earnest, faithful self-examination.

Prayer.

O God, we bless thee and adore thee, that thou hast made clear to us the sign of the prophet Jonah. We bless thee that *we know* thine only Son, the Lord Jesus, was delivered up to

die for our offences, that by his death we might be saved, and the tempest of thy wrath against sin might be turned away from us, and life become to us as a calmed sea, in which our hope in thee may be as an anchor of the soul, both "sure and stedfast." (Heb. vi. 19.) We bless thee that we know that this, thine only Son, the Lord Jesus, was laid in the grave, making it for us a bed of hopeful rest, and that by his own power He rose again, and ascended into heaven; and that when He had thus, by his death, purged away our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, "where He ever liveth to make intercession for us." (Heb. i. 3. vii. 25.) Teach us, O God, we beseech thee, rightly to understand how that our human nature went down with the holy Jesus into the grave, and that in him it rose again, and went to heaven, accepted at the right hand of God, because the debt of sin was fully paid, and Satan's power overthrown." (Heb. ii. 14.) Teach us rightly to understand this great mystery, that, as the Lord Jesus appears now before the throne for us, our human nature is accepted for his sake. Grant that our lives may be holy and pure as those for whom the Son of God appears at thy right hand. Teach us, O our God, "that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the Great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Let thy blessed and Holy Spirit teach us this, for thy Son's sake. Amen.

XXX.

The Lord Jesus had reminded the Jews of the prophet Jonah; of his being cast into the deep, and after being three days in

the belly of the whale, brought up again to finish the service for which God had appointed him. He now passes on to remind them what that service was; and to shew them, that, as the casting out, and the bringing up of Jonah again, on the third day, was a sign that they should live to see fulfilled, so the repentance of the men of Nineveh at the preaching of Jonah, was a sign to them of their own condemnation, because they obstinately refused to listen to the preaching of Jonah's Lord, He whom Jonah himself obeyed. He said :—

MATTHEW xii. 41. *“The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.”*

The people of Nineveh had repented at the preaching of Jonas, though he wrought no miracle. He brought to them no message of love, no offer of mercy. Suddenly he appeared in their city, crying aloud, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” (Jonah iii. 4.) What was it that caused the great city, and all the people in it to be saved? It was this, “they believed God, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.” (Jonah iii. 5.) They did not deny their sins, or excuse them. Humbled and afraid, “the king of Nineveh arose from off his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes,” in sign of his grief for his sin, and of unworthiness of any good thing. He did more than this, he sent forth to his people to call upon them to join with him in humbling themselves before God, and with fasting and prayer to cry mightily unto God, that He would turn away his anger from them, and destroy them not. And so they were saved; for “God saw their works, that they turned from their evil ways; and God repented* of the evil, that He had said He would do to them; and He did it not. (Jonah iii. 10.)

* (Repented.) When God is said to *repent* of a thing, the meaning is, that

But now a greater than Jonah had appeared among the Jews. Greater in every way, for Jonah was the servant, but this was the Master. Jonah came with a message ; but Christ spoke in his own name. Jonah's message was, that Nineveh should be destroyed for the sins of its people ; but the good news that Jesus brought was, that in him all might have pardon and peace. The Ninevites had repented and turned to the Lord, therefore they were forgiven ; but the Jews refused to listen. One greater than Jonas stood among them, but they turned from him, and "would have none of his reproofs." They cared not for his offers of mercy, therefore, in that awful judgment-day, (Rev. xx. 12.), when all the dead, small and great, shall stand before God ; (Luke xi. 32.), then, (said the Lord Jesus to the Pharisees around him) then "The men of Nineveh shall rise up in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it : because they repented at the preaching of Jonas ; and behold a greater than Jonas is here."

And not the men of Nineveh alone ; Jesus declared that an-

He changes his manner of dealing towards the persons spoken of, because of their conduct, and no doubt the expression is made use of, to shew us that we bring good or evil upon our own heads by our conduct. It is written in Gen. vi. 6., "And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth," when He "saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth," Gen. v., and in consequence He drowned all the race of man (except Noah and his family) by a flood, which He brought upon the earth.

In 1 Samuel xv. 11., it is written, that the Lord said "It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king : for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments ;" and the consequence of this was, that God withdrew his favour from Saul, and set up David to be king in his stead. We have just read that upon the people of Nineveh humbling themselves and turning from their evil way, God repented of the evil that he had said he would do to them, and did it not. Therefore from all this as well as from many other passages of Scripture, we may clearly see that God in His great kindness to us makes use of such words as we would ourselves use, that we may understand the great truth—that we must eat the fruit of our own doings ; "but that he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul." Ezekiel xxxiii. 5.

other awful form should stand forth from among the dead to witness against them.

MATTHEW xii. 42. “ *The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it : for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon ; and behold a greater than Solomon is here.* ”

The Scribes and Pharisees knew that the Queen of Sheba had come from afar when she “ heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord,” and that “ she communed with him of all that was in her heart : ” (1 Kings x.) and that when she had heard and seen all the wisdom God had given to Solomon, she blessed the Lord God, and confessed the happiness of those who served him. Yet now that one stood among them who “ spake as never man spake ” before ; whose wisdom was so great, that all that Solomon knew, was, in comparison, only like the lesson repeated by a child, *they* refused to listen to him ! Surely the Queen of the South would rise up in the judgment and condemn them.

Awful were the words of Christ the Lord, and when we think of how they must have been spoken, when we remember that in him there could have been no want of earnestness, nothing in the teacher that could excuse want of attention in those He taught, we may well feel amazed at the hardness of those Jews on whose hearts the words of our Lord fell as the dew falls upon a rock from which neither fruit nor flower can spring.

There was a reason for this, a reason so awful that we may well tremble while we read it ; but before we read the further warning given to the Jews, who thus madly refused to be saved, let us turn to ourselves ; let us solemnly consider if there are none who may rise up with us in the judgment to condemn us, because that though far less taught than ourselves, *they* repented when *we* would not care to hear. Let each one of us

who reads these words of Christ, solemnly ask, and truthfully answer, this question, how long, how much, and how clearly have I been taught the truths in God's words? Was not the Bible placed in my hands from my childhood? From its pages have not the warning voices of all the prophets called to me? Has not the wisdom of Solomon been offered to me as a guide? (Prov. viii. Eccles. xii.) above all, have not the words of tender kindness of my blessed Lord been spoken unto me? And how have I heard? Have I listened as to my hope of life? or have I turned away as from a tale so often told, that I no longer cared to hear? This is the great danger of those born and brought up in a Christian land. Because our blessings are always within our reach, we care the less for them. But will they always remain within our reach? Ah, no; our days are hastening on, the hour is at hand when the word of God will still be preached, but *we* shall no longer be *able* to listen. The words of the prophets, of Solomon, and of Christ himself, shall still be open to us in the Bible, but our failing eyes shall no longer be able to read, nor our ears to hear. Then shall our fainting hearts tremble to think of that awful judgment-day so near at hand: and well may we tremble at the thought. Not only the ancient people of long buried and forgotten cities shall rise up in the judgment to witness against us, but many a poor outcast who wandered in our streets, untaught, uncared for, shall rise in the judgment to condemn us. Not only the queen of the South shall lift up her voice from that awful assembly of the risen dead to condemn us, but shall we not hear our sentence spoken when some poor, neglected one shall pour forth her words of praise for the mercy that reached to her through the scorn and forgetfulness of man. 'No man cared for my soul, none thought it worth their while to teach me, the poor sinful outcast, but the voice of my Saviour *did reach even to me*. I did, though I scarce know how, catch these blessed words of his, "Come unto me and I will give you rest."

O how I needed rest ! I came, I sought him as best I could ; I was the outcast of men, but He did not reject me, and lo I am here ! ” (Luke vii. 47, 48, 50.)

How shall our own hearts condemn us ! While the angels rejoice over the salvation of the penitent sinner who gladly caught at the offer of mercy, and of deliverance from the yoke of sin, shall they not mourn for us, if we have lived in the constant hearing of God’s word and heeded it not ? if outwardly belonging to the Church of Christ, we have been contented with *the name*, and have passed into eternity loaded with the burthen of unforgiven sin !

Blessed be God, there is yet time, O let not one of us delay another hour. He who is greater than the prophets, wiser than Solomon, calls us to repentance and to newness of life. Jesus, the Son of God invites us. Let us not stay till the door is shut. (Matt. xxv. 10.)

Prayer.

O my Saviour, I fall down before thee in shame and sorrow, while I confess how often I have listened to thy words of warning, and heeded them not. I have seen the saving change they have wrought in others. I have known some who, in truth, have passed from death into life, and shall they not rise up in the judgment against me to condemn me, if I remain cold and careless ? O how awful is the trust we have received from thee, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. O grant to us that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of eternal life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.” *

* See Collect for the second Sunday in Advent.

XXXI.

MATTHEW XII. 43—45.

It was "when the people were gathered thick together," that the Lord Jesus gave the answer we have read, to the Scribes and Pharisees, who asked of him a sign from heaven; and now, in the hearing of the people, he shewed by a parable, full of awful meaning, the hardened state to which, as a nation, the Jews had brought themselves by their obstinacy and pride.

MATTHEW xii. 43—45. "*When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry (or desert) places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return unto my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be unto this wicked generation.*"

God had, very early in the history of the world, chosen the Jews to be his own people. He had given them blessings of every sort; he had defended them against their enemies; and when they disobeyed him, he had taught them, by leaving them to themselves, what it was to sin against Him.

In spite of all God's dealings with them, the Jews were "a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity," they forsook the Lord, they "provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger." (Isaiah i. 4.) They gave themselves up to idolatry, so that the land was full of idols, and they worshipped the work of their own hands, (Isaiah ii. 8,) therefore God brought upon them a terrible punishment, He gave up the people into the hands of

their enemies; the voice of gladness ceased from the cities of Judah, Jerusalem was destroyed, and the land made desolate. (Jer. vii. 34.) Israel was led away captive into Babylon. For three-score and ten years the Jews were prisoners in that far foreign land, and the time of this punishment seemed to work in them a cure—the demon of idolatry seemed to have been cast out, and, at the time God appointed, they returned to their own land much purer than before. They never again fell into idolatry; but the very same evil spirit of pride, and of obstinately setting up their own will against the will of God, by degrees took possession of them again; and in a more dangerous shape and manner; for open idolatry carried with it its own name of sin and wickedness; but the hypocritical, proud, and self-deceiving spirit of the Pharisees, which, by degrees, took possession of the Jews, pretended to give God honour, in the very act of dishonouring Him. The Pharisees made His religion a pretence for their evil deeds, they turned His very laws into sin; and, using His own name for their authority, struggled against his power. Thus was their last state worse than their first, and in this state the Lord Jesus found them, resisting the will of God till they were no longer able to see or understand what was His will.

This their fearful condition He shewed to them in a parable under the figure of a man who had been delivered from the power of the devil, and being again possessed by him was in a far worse, and more hopeless state, than at first.*

So was it, and so should it more fully be.

Though the Lord Jesus was speaking immediately to the

* St. Chrysostom, who lived in the fourth century after Christ, and Olshausen, who is only lately dead, have left in their writings the same explanation of this parable of our Lord, which they both apply to the history of the Jewish nation, as represented under the figure of a man possessed by a devil. Thus it appears that the interpretation here given is that which was held by the learned men, both of the old and of the present times. See Homily of Chrysostom, XLIII., and Olshausen on the Gospels, Vol. II., p. 122.

Scribes and Pharisees, through them He spoke to the whole Jewish nation, for they ruled men's opinions; and, as we shall see, the people followed them blindly, even to their destruction. The last state of the Jewish nation was worse than the first. In the old time, they had humbled themselves, at least for a time, when they felt the weight of God's anger. Affliction had seemed to rouse them up to a better spirit, but their goodness had been like the morning dew, it passed away in the sunshine, and no sooner was peace and happiness given back to them, than they again hardened themselves in rebellious pride.

And so, though they knew it not, their *last* state was come, and it was worse than their first, for now they would not suffer themselves to be redeemed. The nation was like a maniac who had once been partly cured, but had sunk back again into a state of madness, and was so completely overpowered by his disease, that he would submit to no means of cure, and must therefore be given up to his hopeless state. The Jewish nation was at this fearful point. They showed it by rejecting Christ the Redeemer, the only hope of man; and the hour was at hand when they would be rejected by Him; and then, when that hour was fully come, ruin, so fearful that it freezes our blood but to read of it, fell upon the nation of the Jews. The last state of Jerusalem was worse a thousand times than the first. The siege by Nebuchadnezzar, the long captivity in Babylon, are forgotten in the horrors of the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, and in the fearful vengeance that overtook the wretched Jews, tortured, massacred, sold into slavery, yet carrying with them, as a people, the same unbending pride that has still, in misery and in banishment, shut their hearts against the humbling but life-giving truths of the gospel of Christ the Lord. Yes, fearfully were these words of Jesus made true: "Even so shall it be unto this wicked generation." They madly hardened their hearts against him till all feeling was lost in one, and the cry of "Crucify him, Crucify him," went up

to heaven in proof that the old spirit of rebellious pride had indeed taken to itself "seven other spirits more wicked" than itself: and many of that generation who, in the vigour of their youth and manhood, rejected Christ, lived to be themselves crucified round the walls of their beloved Jerusalem.

It is true, not only of the Jewish nation, that their last state was worse than the first, but time has shown that this has been a solemn truth of all the nations on the earth who have mis-used their blessings. The men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, and they were forgiven. Their city was saved, and for a time "they turned from their evil ways," so that it might be said also of Nineveh, that the unclean spirit was gone out of her; but alas! it was only for a time, her last state was worse than her first, her people gave themselves up to all kinds of wickedness; and one hundred and fifty years after they had repented at the preaching of Jonah, God declared by another prophet (Nahum i. 14.) "I will make thy grave; for thou art vile." "Woe to the bloody city! it is full of lies and robbery." (Nahum iii. 1.) Another hundred years passed away, and another prophet (Zephaniah ii. 13—15.) gave once again the awful warning. The Lord "will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness, and flocks shall lie down in the midst of her," &c. and that it should be said of her, "This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in!"

Once more a hundred years passed away, and all was fulfilled; Nineveh was no more. Ezekiel writes of the whole empire and power of the Assyrians* as a thing past and gone, under the

* Nineveh was the capital or chief town of Assyria. The prophet Ezekiel, who was at that time a captive in Babylon, most likely himself saw the complete desolation he so beautifully describes.

All that has been known of ancient Nineveh till now, has chiefly been found

image of a tree that had been the mightiest and the fairest of all the forests of the earth, but had been cut down, and the nations had been shaken at the sound of its fall. (Eze. xxx. 1.)

in the Scriptures ; for the Assyrian empire was entirely passed and gone, before the time when regular history began ; and it is most interesting to find preserved in the Bible, those records of this mighty empire which would otherwise have been unknown, and have only been preserved because of their being in some degree connected with the history of God's people Israel. In Gen. x. 11., the building of Nineveh is slightly mentioned, the world was then about 1650 years old, and in the book of Jonah it is spoken of as "an exceeding great city of three days journey," probably meaning in a straight line through the place, Jonah iii. 3., and as having so many inhabitants, that there were in it more than 120,000 young children. Jonah iv. 11.

We read of the Assyrians as the enemies of Israel all through the Old Testament. They are mentioned again and again in the books of Kings, of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel ; and the prophet Nahum, who lived about a hundred years later than Jonah, though the time for the fall of Nineveh was not fully come, gives a most lively description of the manner in which it should be destroyed. "The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots. The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword, and the glittering spear ; and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcases ; and there is none end of their corpses ; they stumble upon their corpses." Also of the manner in which luxury and sin had made the people unable to defend themselves. "Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women : the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies : the fire shall devour thy bars." Nahum iii. 13. In the prophecy of Zephaniah, is described the state of complete ruin in which Nineveh was left, a ruin so complete, that the sand of the desert gathered over it, and the grass, where grass could grow, sprang up upon it, and it is only within the last few years, that it has been known that some ranges of low hills near the banks of the Tigris, are the covered ruins of the walls of ancient Nineveh. About thirty years since a traveller, (Mr. Rich,) went to this place, and made many curious observations, which strengthened the idea that these were the remains of Nineveh, but within these last two or three years, another traveller, (Mr. Layard), by digging among these hills, and into mounds covered with wild flowers, has brought to the light of day the temples and palaces of Nineveh. After having perished from the face of the earth, and having been buried below it between two and three thousand years, once again it is brought up to the sight of man. And at this very time, there are in London strange figures of the Idol gods of the Assyrians, of their kings and priests, and large slabs of stones covered with writing that no man yet has been able to read. These have been placed in the British Museum, where any one who happens to be in London

So completely was it swept away that men could only guess where once the mighty city stood. But lo ! in this *our* day, in which we who read this book are living, Nineveh has again appeared as a witness of God's truth. The ruins of the perished city, with her mighty palaces, and idol temples, after having been buried in the earth for nearly 3,000 years, are again brought to light ; and though the men of Nineveh who repented at the preaching of Jonah, shall rise up in the judgment to condemn the generation of the Jews who would not repent at the preaching of the Lord Jesus, the ruins of Nineveh itself are rising up in *this day* to warn the men of this our generation, what the end is of nations who having been purified from sin, turn back again to their own evil ways. And this is a lesson that our own country especially needs. God in his mercy sent the gospel of Christ to the land when it lay in heathen darkness. The light of the knowledge of the truth sprung up, and Britain became one of the Christian nations ; but very soon pride and ambition, and ignorance, and superstition, caused the religion of Christ to be almost hidden under men's inventions, and often to be made a cloak and an excuse for evil deeds. Then God in his great mercy once again interfered, and by means of his word, the holy Bible, being translated into our own language, all men could see how far they had left the simple truth, and gone into error. The holy Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper were given back to

may see them without any expence. And it is well worth the while, for in these ancient remains, the men of Nineveh seem to rise up to testify to this generation what the end must be of those mighty kingdoms, that use the power God has given them only for their own pleasure. Let Englishmen remember, that the men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, *but turned again to their own evil ways* ; and let the remains of ancient Nineveh, now so unexpectedly brought before us, speak to our hearts and awaken our fears. They cry aloud, to all who will hear, "No kingdom can stand but the kingdom of God." Let His religion and His service be the hope and the strength of Britain our native land, that our last state may not also be worse than our first.

us in their first purity. We were taught as a nation from God's own word, for our Church was cleansed from error, and in this state our own land, Britain, now stands. Let us take warning from the fate of other nations. Let the men of *this* generation take heed to the words of the Lord Christ, that *our* last state may not be worse than the first. Among all the cities that have sunk into ruins, all the nations that have passed away, *one* kingdom has remained from the beginning, and shall go on growing stronger and stronger till the end. It is the kingdom of Christ, which has been gathered out of every nation, for in every land "He knoweth them that trust in him," (Nahum i. 7.) and all who have sought the Lord have been hid in the day of his anger; (Zeph. ii. 3.) therefore if Britain will only know her safety, and hold fast the truth that has been given her, and take her stand upon this, that she is a Christian nation, then shall she remain firm unto the end. And how may this be done? Surely by every Briton remembering that as Christ died for him, he is bound to live for Christ; that the will of God must be his will, and the word of God his rule. The time is come that our land is no longer large enough for our children, and every year numbers depart from our country to make to themselves new homes abroad in those far-off places that are called our Colonies. O let each one who so departs, remember that he takes with him the knowledge of God's truth, and that this knowledge is like a precious seed which he is bound to sow in his new country; so shall it be, that, wherever the English tongue is spoken, God shall be praised, and the kingdom of his Son established.

This is a glorious part to play in the world's history, and in this great work rich and poor may join; for each Christian labouring man, may be the head of a Christian family in countries where the true God has not long been known, and he thus may help to make "the wilderness blossom like the rose." And thus the duty of each Christian man and woman, whether at

home or abroad, brings us back to the parable of Christ the Lord, spoken to the Jews, for it is true of each one separate person, as it is true of all nations. We shall do well to read it again.

“ When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out ; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there : and the last state of that man is worse than the first.” This parable was true of each one Pharisee who, having been brought up in the knowledge of the law of God, heard Christ speak, and turned from him ; and it is true of each one, man and woman, who having heard the word of God, are so convinced of its truth, that for a time they are frightened from their sins, that is, they make some sort of reform in their lives ; but their hearts are by no means changed. Though they may have given up some open sins through fear, they have no wish to become the true servants of God, they would not like to become holy in heart and life, and so, though the unclean spirit of open sin may for a time have been sent away, it, as it were, hankers to return, and no real love of God having been taken into the heart, it does in time return, and becomes seven times stronger than ever ; for often, too often, hypocrisy, that worst of evil spirits, that would try, if it could, to cheat God himself, is added to the old sins, “ and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

Oh let each one of us take heed to ourselves, and let “ the fear of God ” be indeed to us, “ the beginning of wisdom,” a beginning that shall know no stop, that shall lead us on to know him and to love him more, to serve him each day more truly, till at length that good beginning has found its glorious end—a home in heaven through Christ our Lord.

Prayer.

Blessed Saviour, thou hast come into the world to destroy the power of the Evil One. By thy death and resurrection Satan was cast out; but he is ever seeking to return. Baptized unto thee, we have been taught thy will; O let it be perfected in us. Let thy Holy Spirit so dwell within us, that filled with the love of God, we may have no room for evil desires; but by thy help we may be able each day to serve thee better, so shall Satan never more be able to possess our hearts. Let us not be high-minded, satisfied with our state; but let us ever fear, lest by growing careless, we should fall away from thee, and so our last state be worse than our first. O holy Lord and Saviour, look in pity on our native land; grant that thy blessing may rest upon it, that our strength may be in thee, that our glory may be, that thou art our acknowledged Lord, and our greatest happiness, to carry the knowledge of thee; the Redeemer, to every land. Grant that wherever the English tongue is spoken, grateful hymns of praise may rise to thee, our Saviour and our God. Amen.

XXXII.

LUKE XI. 27.

While the people listened with deep attention to the words of Jesus, as he warned them that if they heeded him only for the time, and then turned back again to their own evil ways, their last end would be worse than the first, he was stopped in his discourse by a voice that suddenly was heard from among the crowd who sat around him. It was the voice of a woman :

LUKE xi. 27, 28. “ *And it came to pass as He spake*

these things, a certain woman lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps (breasts) which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."

While the proud Pharisees accused the Holy Jesus of casting out devils by the prince of the devils, this woman was so filled with delight and wonder at every word He spoke, that she could not help bursting out into this exclamation.

She must have been a mother herself, or her thoughts would not have flown to the mother of Jesus. She must have known what an anxious joy it was to have a son; and, as she listened to Him, her whole soul was filled with his glory, and with the blessedness of her who had been so honoured as to rear Him on her bosom. But mark the words of Jesus, "Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it."

The woman who had thus spoken had no thought for herself, except, perhaps, inasmuch as she was herself a mother and knew a mother's feelings; but the Lord Jesus led her thoughts to the salvation of her own soul, a greater blessing than to have called him Son. His words, in the language in which they are written, seem to allow that there was some truth in what she had said, that it was a blessing to have been His mother; but that it was a far greater, to hear, to believe, and to obey the message He had brought from God His Father. The blessed Jesus cared not to raise wonder and admiration in those who heard him; He only cared to bring about a change in their whole lives, and for this reason He answered the woman, by shewing her that a better blessing was open to her—to each one who then heard him—to each one of us who have it in our power to "hear the word of God and to keep it."

Almost immediately a thing happened which proved to all the truth of His words, for—

MATTHEW xii. 46, 47. *"While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee."*

St. Luke tells the reason why they stood without. It was this, they "could not come at him, for the press," the crowds of people being very great; and St. Mark adds, that they "sent unto him, calling him." Our Lord did not, for this, interrupt his discourse; he made use of the message sent to him through the crowd, to teach a great truth to the people who had been listening to him, and to all who should in after time read or hear His word. He did not desire that His mother and His brethren should be brought into the house where He was.

MATTHEW xii. 48—50. *"But He answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."*

Why did not the Lord Jesus either go out to them, or have them brought in? He was without fault; though made in our nature in the likeness of a man, He was without sin, therefore we know that He was a dutiful son and a loving kinsman; yet He suffered His mother and His brethren to stand without. Why was this? We must remember that at the very time when Jesus went into the house where He now was, when the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread, that his friends "when they heard of it, went out to lay hold of him; for they said, He is beside himself,"* either believing or pretending to believe that He was mad.

* Mark iii. 19—21. No. XXV. p. 127.

Their intention was to lay hold of him, that if they could not persuade him, they might, by force, oblige him to give up His work, or at least to carry it on more quietly. They could not well do this without His mother's consent; therefore it seems they had sought her out, and brought her with them when they came to seize him.

We cannot for a moment suppose that the mother of our Lord at all believed what they said, or joined with them in their desire "to lay hold of him;" but she may have been greatly distressed and perplexed by the different reports that went abroad of her Son. His ministry and manner of life was altogether so different from what all had expected of the Messiah, that afraid, distressed, and, perhaps, disappointed, the afflicted mother may have come, not with a failing faith, but with a mind perplexed and tormented, rather to seek for comfort from her Son and Lord, than really to take him home.* Whatever was the motive that brought her there, the answer of Jesus was full of deep meaning for her and His brethren, for His own disciples, and those who sat about him, and for all who, since that time, have heard and read His words. "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" Who are they that they should hinder the great work that my Father in heaven hath given me to do? Can they make such a mistake as to believe that my love for them will cause me for their sakes to give it up? Or can they think that they have any authority over me? They are dear to me by nature, but those whom God hath given me to help in the great work which I came into the world to do, are yet nearer to me than my natural relatives.

"And He stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!" How encouraging it must have been to his disciples to hear these words. They must have been glad that they had left all to follow Christ; and when in after years they were left alone in the

* Olshausen, Vol. II., p. 215, 216.

world, their Lord and Master gone, the remembrance of these words must have strengthened them under the trials of danger and distress brought upon them by his religion and the work he had left them to do. But not to his disciples only Jesus spoke, "for *whosoever*," He said, "shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." Blessed words, full of comfort to all in every place, and in every time, who seek to know the will of God and to do it ! Each one of us may thus become dear to Christ as his brother, his sister, and his mother !

Prayer.

Blessed Lord, give us, we pray thee, wisdom to know thy Father's will, and power to do it. Take us into his family, that we may be, each one of us, dear to thee as a sister, a brother, and even as a mother. Oh, when we think of our unworthiness, we know not how this can be ! Nor could it ever be but for the greatness of thy love to those for whom thou hast died. Thy death has reconciled our God and Father to us, and given to us the help of thy Holy Spirit, so that we can now be taught to know God's will, and knowing it, can receive from thee power to do it. O holy and beloved Lord, fit and prepare our hearts, till, weak and wandering as we are, we may yet be brought into the inner circle of thy family ; and let no tone of us be content till thy Spirit bear witness in our hearts that we are indeed the children of God, and dear to thee as a brother, a sister, and a mother are dear. Let this thought, O God, be our support through life and death, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

XXXIII.

MATTHEW XIII. 1. MARK IV. 1. LUKE VIII. 4.

MATTHEW xiii. 1, 2. "*The same day went Jesus out of*

the house, and sat by the sea-side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that He went into a ship, and sat ; and the whole multitude stood on the shore."

Let us remember what we have read of the beautiful sea of Galilee, and of its shores,* that we may picture to ourselves the Lord Jesus sitting in the little ship, close to the land, and the people crowding to the edge of the water. It must have been towards evening, for we have already read of much that had passed that day in the house, (Mark iii. 19. &c.) which it is most likely our Saviour did not leave with his disciples till the heat of the mid-day sun was over. Let us now, then, try in thought, to see him as He sat, his boat balancing on the waters of the lake, for they are never still, but always so clear that they show every pebble below them, as they ripple upon the fine white sand that covers its shores. And the people; what a picture must they have been ! The hills rising behind them covered with vineyards and olive-gardens, with citron and orange and date trees. Flowering shrubs about them close to the water's-edge. Far away on the other side of the lake, the snowy top of Mount Hermon, rising into the skies.† Above their heads, the blue heavens. Before them the beautiful lake with every shadow pictured on it as in a mirror !

It is of use to think of all this, for it helps us to feel how real is all we read of the holy Jesus, and we are so weak, so wandering in our minds, that we need every help. When we seem to see him thus, we shall be the better able to listen to his words, spoken at the time to that eager crowd, but sounding through the long years that have passed since then, even down

* Vol. I. pages 77, 78.

† Capernaum, near which all this happened, is on the West side, near to the top of the sea of Galilee ; and the range of mountains, of which Hermon is the highest, stretches far away to the North East, at some distance on the other side of the lake or sea.

to this our day, and concerning each one of us even as they concerned all those who then pressed to hear him, and who have so long since passed to their great account.

The Lord Jesus had that morning spoken much and long to the people while in the house. He had shown them that the kingdom of God **was** to come unto them. He had warned them to beware of speaking lightly of holy things, and of the sad end of those who should for a time listen to him, and then turn to their own evil ways. He had shown them that in the judgment-day, many would rise to condemn them who **had** turned to God at a call far less powerful than his. Now in the evening of that same day, from the boat upon the lake, He spoke many things to them in parables. He spoke to them in short stories full of deep meaning, which showed them, from the things of common life, the value of his teaching, and above all, this great truth, that the holy word of God, given by him to men, must either in them bring forth the fruits of holiness, or, by being neglected, perish, and add to their condemnation.

‘Perhaps the Lord Jesus, when He lifted up his eyes, saw at no great distance, an husbandman scattering his seed in the furrows,’* at all events, it was from the business of the fields He taught the people, saying :

MATTHEW xiii. 3—9. “ *Behold, a sower went forth to sow : And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way-side, and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth ; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth : and when the sun was up, they were scorched ; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns ; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them. But others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some*

* Trench on the Parables, p. 63.

an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

This solemn call of the Lord Jesus to hear and to take heed to the parable of the sower, shows us that it will be well for us to stay till we rightly understand it, before we pass on to the other parable which He spoke to the people from the boat: and Jesus himself has, in his kindness, left to us his own explanation of his own meaning. His disciples were surprised that He should teach the people in this manner, instead of speaking to them more plainly, and they

MATTHEW xiii. 10. "*Came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables ?*"

His answer is very awful, and may well fill us with fear, lest we should allow either prejudice or pride or carelessness, to cause us to take no heed to the word of God when spoken to us. To the question—"Why speakest thou to them in parables ?"

Verse 11. "*He answered and said unto them, (unto his disciples,) Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries (the deep truths) of the kingdom of heaven ; but to them it is not given.*"

Why was this ? Jesus gives the reason.

Verse 12. "*For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance : but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that he hath.*"

Now what was it these disciples had, that was to cause more to be given them ? And what was it the others had not, that they were to lose even what little they had ? The disciples had a willing, teachable mind, they wished to learn, and therefore they should certainly be taught. They believed that the Lord Jesus spoke the truth, and therefore they should certainly

be made able to understand the truths He taught. They believed that they needed his help, and therefore they should have it. They believed that He was come to show them the way to the kingdom of God, and therefore they should certainly be shewn what that kingdom was, and how they were to enter therein. It is true that, as yet, they knew very little of its truths, understood very little of the mighty work their Lord was come to do, but they earnestly desired to know all he was willing to teach, therefore "the mysteries (or deep truths) of the kingdom of heaven" should certainly be made plain unto them.

And what was it the others had not ?

The Pharisees, and those who were of their mind, were too full of themselves and of their own wisdom to have any wish to be taught by Christ, therefore even what knowledge they had would become useless to them. Proud, stubborn, and self-willed, they had no willingness of mind, no desire to understand the real nature of the Messiah's kingdom, and therefore, there should be "taken away from them even that they had," for they should, as time went on, and they became more used to see the miracles of Christ, and to hear his warning voice, lose even that mixture of fear and respect which had till now, somewhat kept down their rage and hatred.

We shall see, as we read the sad history of the last year our Lord spent on earth, how true was this saying of his ; for we shall see how the followers of Christ became more and more in earnest, and were more fully taught ; while the Pharisees and their followers became more and more blinded by their rage and fury. We shall see how the disciples were faithful to the trust their Lord left to them when He returned to heaven, and how they went unto all nations, carrying with them the glad tidings of his gospel, (Matt. xxviii. 16—19,) and we shall see how the Pharisees and their party dared to cry aloud, " His blood (the blood of Messiah whom they slew) be upon us and

upon our children," Matt. xxvii. 20—24,) and, waxing worse and worse, how they persecuted to the death all who called upon the name of the Lord. (Acts.)

These things have in them a solemn warning for us. How do *we* receive the truths of the kingdom of Christ? Do we listen and read with prejudiced minds, determined to believe only as we like, explaining away God's truths till we make them suit our own taste and case? Are our minds already made up as to what God *ought to do*? Do *we* say, (as many do say,) 'I cannot, and will not, believe such and such doctrines, for they are against my ideas of common sense and of common justice?' Oh beware! It was thus the Pharisees felt and spoke. That the long-looked-for Messiah, the Deliverer, was at last to come in such a shape as the meek and lowly Jesus, offering them no deliverance from the power of the Romans, no triumph over the nations of the earth, by giving them their place as the first of its kingdoms; but only deliverance from the power of sin; only a place in the yet unseen kingdom of heaven; all this was against *their* ideas of common sense, and of common justice. How shall man, weak and ignorant as are the wisest, thus dare to reason against his Maker, who is the only wise and all-seeing God! Oh let *us* be truly wise, let us have no wish but to learn what, in his kindness, the Lord Jesus came down from heaven to teach. Let us empty our hearts of all pride, of all prejudice, of all self-will, for it is most true that truth is like the morning dew, which can only be found pure when it falls on that which is pure.

Prayer.

O God, my Saviour, give me a humble, simple heart, that I may be willing, earnest, to learn what thou, in thy great mercy, art willing to teach. I have nothing that is good of my own. Oh empty my heart of all that is sinful, and give me holy desires, that having that little, I may receive more abundantly the

truths thou didst bring down with thee from heaven, that pure from earthly dross, they may have power to give life to my fainting soul. Hear me, my God, for the sake of thy Son, my Saviour. Amen.

XXXIV.

MATTHEW XIII. 13. MARK IV. 12.

Furthermore, our Lord said unto his disciples, in answer to these questions, why He taught in parables ?

MATTHEW xiii. 13. “ *Therefore (for this reason) speak I to them in parables ; because they seeing, see not ; and hearing, they hear not ; neither do they understand.*”

It is the curse of sin, and its punishment, that it prevents those who persist in it from understanding the truths that might save them. The enemies of the Lord Jesus were so full of self-will, and of hatred to him and his doctrines, that they *would not*, and therefore *could not*, see the holy meaning of his teaching. He reminded all who wished to learn of him, that this had always been the temper of some of their countrymen, and that the effect had always been the same. In the days of the prophet Isaiah it had been so ; and this temper of theirs had caused Isaiah to say *to them then*, nearly the same words Jesus spake *of them now*. Indeed, that stupifying of the mind, and hardening of the heart, foretold by Isaiah, as the effect of *wilful* sin, was more fully brought to pass in the enemies of Christ.

MATTHEW xiii. 14, 15, “ *In them (said the Lord Jesus) is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand ; and seeing ye shall*

see, and shall not perceive : For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed ; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

It was for *this* reason then, that the all-merciful Saviour spoke to them in parables ! It was because their unwillingness to hear made them unable to understand ! This may perhaps, seem to us a strange reason why our Lord, always so full of kindness, should teach them in a way that required so much attention ; but was it not the way most likely to fix their attention ; to move them to think well what the parables might mean ? And it is clear, from the words of our Lord, that if at any time they would hear with willing minds, so that they might understand and be converted, their sins should be forgiven them. If any of them at this time heard what our Lord said to those of his followers who came to him to know his reasons, nothing could be more likely than this answer of his to stir them up, and, as it were, to provoke them to attend ; especially when he added, speaking to those who *wished* to learn,—

MATTHEW xiii. 16, 17. "*But blessed are your eyes, for they see ; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."*

In this last sentence of our Lord, we see how true it is that the New Testament is to the Old Testament what the noon-day is to the early dawn, that tells the morning is coming, and that the sun will soon arise. In the one God gave the promise, in the other He fulfilled it. The prophets and righteous men, who lived in the days of the Old Testament, were like men

coming out of the darkness of night, who see the clouds breaking, and long for the sun to rise ; and Christ was the Sun of righteousness for whom they longed. They saw the promise of His coming in the signs of the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Jewish Law ; they heard foretold, his names, his character, and even the place of his birth, and his manner of life ; his gentle words, his loving-kindness, and the willingness with which He would bear the weight that should be laid upon him, even the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah liii.) But with these signs and promises, there was so much that darkened their meaning, that, like things seen in the early dawn, they were not clearly understood ; and the prophets who spoke, and the righteous men who listened to the promises of the Messiah, earnestly longed to see more clearly—to understand more plainly. To them it was not given ; they lived, they died in faith, not having received the promises, (Hebrews xi.) but knowing assuredly that they were true, and that when God's time was come, the Messiah should appear.

God's time came at last, the clouds cleared away, the bright morning sun arose, and, rejoicing in His light, the disciples stood around the Messiah, seeing and hearing the things the prophets and righteous men of old had longed to see and hear. Oh was it not sad that many turned from the light of His truth, and closed their eyes, and shut their ears, lest they should see, and hear, and understand with their hearts and be converted, and so God should heal them ? (Matt. xiii. 15.) Let *us* take heed to *ourselves*, for to us, even more clearly than to them, is the truth revealed. To those believers who lived in the days of Christ, mistake and ignorance and prejudice, like the shadows of the night, passed away before the brightness of His presence ; but it was only as the events of His life and death took place, fulfilling the Scriptures, that they were fully understood. To us all is clear, for we look back upon the things that *have* happened. Like men standing upon a hill, we can at once see the

whole, and, if we will, understand how He, who at one time was called the mighty God, the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Prince of peace, who should lead forth His armies to victory ; * in whose name the Gentiles should trust, should yet be the same who was led as a lamb to the slaughter. We know how " He made his grave with the wicked," and yet how " the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." † The sacrifice of Christ is past, and we know that He ever liveth to make intercession for us, in this we are even more blessed than the disciples who pressed to the edge of the sea of Galilee, that they might hear the words of life as they were spoken from the fishers' boat. Do we long to hear and understand ? Then blessed are our eyes, as well as theirs, for they shall see ; and blessed are our ears, as well as theirs, for we shall hear. Not one who cares to hear and to understand, need tremble at the words of the Lord Jesus, when He gave as his reason for speaking to the wilfully blind in parables, " that seeing, they may see, and not perceive ; and hearing, they may hear, and not understand, lest at any time they should be converted and their sins should be forgiven them." ‡ The one difference between them and the blessed hearers of Christ, was just this, *they had no desire to learn*. Not one who desires to know need fear, but rather should rejoice in Christ's blessing.

Prayer.

We bless thee, O our God, that we are born in a time when the Gospel shines all around us as the clear noon-day. We see and hear those things that holy men of old desired to see and hear, but saw and heard them not. Their faith is a witness against us, if in the clearer light of Christian days, we wilfully close our eyes, and our ears, and harden our hearts against thy saving truths. Nothing but the love of sin can produce such madness ; O save us from its power ; *compel* us, if need be, to " lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset

* Isa. ix. 6.

† Ibid liii. 9, 10.

‡ Mark iv. 12.

us," that we may "run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith," that we may in the end "receive a kingdom which cannot be moved," and may "have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear." (Heb. xii.) For Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

XXXV.

MATT. XIII. 18. MARK IV. LUKE VIII. 11.

Having heard our Lord's reason for speaking to the people in parables, let us now attend to his own explanation of the Parable of the "Sower who went forth to sow his seed." It seems that this explanation was not given till late in the evening of that day when the Lord Jesus, with his disciples, was returned into the house, for St. Mark says:—

MARK iv. 10. "*And when He was alone, they that were about him with the twelve (Apostles) asked of him the parable.*"

His answer given by St. Luke, seems to tell us, that the manner in which this parable is to be understood, is the manner in which all his parables should be understood; therefore the explanation which our Lord gives of it, may be looked upon as the key to the explanation of all parables. His words were these as given by St. Mark.

Verses 13—15. "*And He said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables? The sower soweth the word. And these are they by the way-side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.*"

St. Matthew says :—

MATTHEW XIII. 19. “ *When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received the seed by the way-side.*”

Christ himself was the sower, and all who by him are appointed to teach are likewise sowers. The word of God is the seed; the hearts of men the soil. We read in the parable that some of the seed fell by the way-side, and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. (Luke viii. 5.) Our Lord has just told us that this, the way-side, means those who, not understanding the word, cannot keep it, so as to do them any good, but presently lose it, through the evil influence of our great enemy, Satan. Now as this parable is spoken unto us, as well as unto those who first heard it, it concerns us much to understand its meaning fully, and first of all to think well what is that state of mind which is pictured to us as the way-side. We shall best do this by calling to mind a real way-side, or hard footpath. The ground in it has not been broken up, the seed cannot sink *into* it, it lies upon the face of it, and we cannot expect that it will grow. Of course it will be trodden down by the feet of the passers-by, or carried off by the birds. There is nothing wrong with the seed, but it has fallen upon a place in which it cannot grow. And some men, and some women have their minds in such a state that the word of God is of no use to them. How do they come into this state? They bring themselves to it when they keep their hearts open to all this world's evil, till they become hard as a pavement. It was of no use for the Pharisees, while in this state, to listen to the words of Christ, and it is of no use for any one of us to hear the best preacher that ever explained God's word with a heart given up to worldly things. While the mind is as a footpath, through which worldly plans, worldly desires, or worldly pas-

sions, are always passing to and fro, the word *cannot* take root in it. That man (or woman) cannot be brought to understand and to believe all that God's word speaks to him of the sin of his heart, of the need of a *Redeemer*, of the holiness God requires of him. He hears these things indeed, but he *heeds* them not, and what renders his state more hopeless is, that the evil one, Satan, the enemy of God and man, is ever on the watch to take advantage of the sin and folly of men; and lest by any means they should hear and be saved, he takes care to send evil thoughts, and sinful lusts; so that by their help, he "immediately taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts." But need any one *remain* in this hopeless state? Ask the labourers in the fields if nothing can be done to change a trodden path into good soil, in which the corn will grow just as well as in the rest of the field? He will tell you 'there needs nothing but to plough it up. If the ground is broken, the rain and the dews will soften it, and it will soon be fit to receive the good seed.' Now how can the hard heart that has been trodden down by the world be broken up? how can it be softened so as to receive to advantage the good seed of the word? God has appointed the means. Would any one be roused out of his state of ignorant contentment with himself, which makes him careless of the things of religion? Let him bring to bear upon his heart and life the *strictness* of *God's holy law*. Like a ploughshare that will break up his false hopes; that will shew him how hard his heart is for he will find his very nature resist the strictness of the holy law of God. But if he is in earnest to have the hardness of his heart taken away, he will not spare himself. He will give himself no rest till he knows and feels that he is a sinner. This is the *ploughing-up* of the way-side; and then, when the heart is at last broken by the sense of sin, the influences of God's Holy Spirit, like the gentle, softening dews, will come down and make ready that heart to receive the good

seed of the Gospel of Christ. So shall the man become a penitent. So shall he pass out of that most hopeless state in which he listened to all that could be said of Christ and of his religion—agreed to it that it all was true, and then turned away and thought of it no more. There is one thing that remains to be said. How can the way-side hearer know his state? How can the hard heart feel its hardness so as to have even a wish to become softened? This knowledge, this feeling cannot come from the man, it must be of God; but I do not believe that the man or woman ever lived to whom the fear has not come at times, *that all was not right*. That whisper, that secret fear was sent of God, and if used aright may be the beginning of the breaking up of the way-side, of the bringing it into the fruitful field.*

The Lord Jesus having explained who were the way-side hearers, passes on to another sort, to whom the word of God was also useless. It will be best for us to repeat the words of the parable itself, and then the words of his explanation. "And some fell upon stony ground; where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth; but when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away."

Our Lord in explanation saith:—

MARK iv. 16, 17. "*And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; (on the rock), who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.*" (In the

* This number, being too long for reading aloud, is divided according to the subjects of the parable, and the prayer at the end is in like manner divided into several parts, to suit the reading.

words of St. Luke, viii. 13.) *These have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away."*

This sort is quite different from the way-side hearers, but the end is the same, neither can bring forth fruit. Now what was it these on the rock wanted? They wanted depth of soil, and therefore they wanted a root through which they could receive moisture and nourishment, which would enable them to bear up under the heat of the mid-day sun. We know from our Lord himself, that such plants, which were beautiful for a time, and so soon withered away, were meant by him as pictures of those persons who should begin to follow him, and when trials came should fall away. What is meant by the soil of which there was no depth? and what is meant by the root for want of which they withered away? The soil is that deep earnestness of belief which shall make men count the loss of all things but as gain, so that they "may win Christ and be found in him." The root, always out of sight, is the hidden life of the Christian, that life which is out of the sight of other men, on which the firmness and steadiness of his Christian character depends.* As it is through the hidden roots of the plant that the nourishment is drawn up through the stem and branches, even so in the Christian's hidden life, that life which is hid with Christ in God, lie the sources of his Spirit's strength and growth in holiness. Unless there is a deep soil of earnest faith from which, as by a secret root, the soul is always drawing in strength of purpose, no man, no woman, can in all seasons, and under all trials, live a religious life. It is this, and not *the place* in which our lot lies, that makes the difference. Many of the best vineyards hang upon the rocky sides of a mountain, for soil has been brought, in which to plant the vines, and *the place*, instead of an evil, has become a good, for it lies warm in the heat of the sun. In the parable we read that it was not the rock, it was

* Trench on the Parables. p. 70.

not the heat of the mid-day sun that withered the plant, but it was because there was no deepness of earth that it had no root, and so it lacked moisture and withered away. Neither is it the *place* in which we dwell, nor the trials we meet with; whether they be trials of sunshine or of storm; that is, whether we are over-praised and much made of, or neglected and despised, or even persecuted; whether we are rich and happy, or poor and miserable; it is not these things that make the difference, it is this, Do we *believe* with a true belief that God in Christ is the only real good? If we thus believe, we shall secretly and constantly seek his help, and being rooted in this good and deep soil, we shall bring forth the fruits of a holy life.

The crowds who heard the Lord Jesus speak on the shores of the sea of Galilee, might have seen this part of the parable well explained if they looked up to the cliffs above them. There, in the breaks of the rocks, were dry and withered leaves, that shortly before had been as wreaths of lovely flowers, but having "no depth of earth they were scorched, and because they had no root, they had withered away." And there also were olive-gardens, and vineyards crowning the rocky hills, for man had taken pains with the soil, and the plants grew and flourished because they had depth of earth for their roots.*

Of the seed which the sower cast into the ground, the Lord Jesus said, that "some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it." (Luke viii. 7.) Here was no fault in the soil, the hindrance lay in the thorns which grew *together with the seed* in the soil. Of this state our Lord gives this striking explanation.

* These olive-gardens and vineyards have long since disappeared, and for the reason here given, no man now cares for the soil, and the olives and the vines cannot grow. Neither can our souls prosper, if we neglect the *hidden* life of religion. I believe that every falling off in religion, springs first from the neglect of secret prayer, the hidden root through which comes that which is the life of our souls.

MATTHEW xiii. 22. "*He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word ; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, [and the lusts (or sinful desires of other things) entering in, Mark iv. 19.] choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful : "* or, as St. Luke gives it, "*they bring no fruit to perfection.*"

Now every labourer, though he may be ignorant in many things, knows this—that seed cannot grow, to do any good, among thorns, for he knows that the thorns will certainly choke its roots below the earth, and keep the air and light from its blade above the earth, and therefore that it never can be able to bear any fruit. Our Lord shows us what are these thorns, and that they are to be found in the lot both of the poor man and of the rich. Nothing but watchful care can keep them out. 'The poor man's toil is how to live at all, to keep hunger and nakedness from his door, to struggle for his daily bread ;' these are cares indeed, and if they are not met in faith, they will crush and hinder the life of his soul. But there are in the rich man's lot cares as great, of which the poor man little dreams. That which our Lord well calls "*the deceitfulness of riches,*" takes a thousand shapes, which choke the word of God and hinder its growth in the heart. The desire of riches is as a choking weed ; with it the good seed cannot grow. The misuse of riches is a fearful sin. Selfishness, and pride, and vanity of heart, and the love of sinful pleasure, are thorns with which the word of God cannot grow, so as to bring forth fruit. Christ himself in another place has said, "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." And they who would receive the word of God in very truth, so as to bring forth the fruits of a good life, must instantly set about rooting up the thorns, casting all their care upon God, and whether in poverty or in riches, making His service their labour and their delight, for it is possible to be very poor, and yet free from

MARK IV. 8, 20. MATT. XIII. 23. LUKE VIII. 15. 189

sinful care : it is possible to be rich and not to be deceived, to be in this world, and not to be choked with its cares.

Blessed be God, all the good seed of the word is not lost. Our Saviour in this parable tells us, that

MARK IV. 8. "*Other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased, and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred-fold.*"

And He explains the meaning of this in these words :—

Verse 20. "*And these are they which are sown on good ground ; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some an hundred.*"

In the words of Christ as given by St. Matthew, it is—

MATTHEW XIII. 23. "*He that heareth the word, and understandeth it.*"

And as St. Luke writes :—

LUKE VIII. 15. "*They, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.*"

Here at last is a good soil fit for sowing, and in it, the seed takes root, grows, and brings forth fruit abundantly. But the good soil means an honest and good heart, that understands the value of the word ; and receiving it, keeps it, and with patient perseverance brings forth the fruits of the religion which the word teaches. How is this ? How can any heart be called good, before the word and the Spirit have made it so ! And yet in the parable we read that the seed *finds* a good soil, and does not *make* it.* In man dwelleth no good thing, and "there is none good but God." How then do the Scriptures often

* Trench.

“good men?” For this reason, that there always have been some who loved the darkness, because their deeds were evil, self-excusers, who called evil good, and good evil; and some, who like Matthew, and Zaccheus, confessed their deeds, justifying God; and like Nathanael, in whom Christ said there was no guile. Some there are, who, before they are taught, feel their need of being taught, for they have not resisted the grace of God that like the sunshine shines on all. Simple, truthful, and earnest, they are in a fit state to receive God’s word, and it is sent unto them. Nothing makes us more clearly understand this, than the difference we feel there is between those who, for their souls’ sake pressed to hear the words of the Lord Jesus, and those who watched His words that they might find in them something of which they might accuse Him, or who turned away from Him in careless scorn. The difference did not lie in their past lives, for some of those who gladly listened had been known sinners; it lay in the then present state of their hearts, which, under the image of a good soil, our Lord has shown was fit for sowing with the word of God, and would certainly bring forth good fruit. This is what He has called “an honest and good heart,” and it is a comfort to know that the great sign of this state of heart, is *to feel the need of being taught*; for the hard soil may become soft, the shallow soil may become rich and deep, and the soil which has been beset with thorns may become open and clear; and when the seed of the word is once sown deeply in the heart of man, it has the power of giving life to itself, and so producing abundantly the fruits of holiness.

Two things we have to remember. The first thing is, and it is a solemn thought, that each of our hearts is soil which must be sown with the word of God, and that upon ourselves greatly depends the state in which that good seed shall find it; for is it not in our own power to prevent our hearts from being, like the way-side, hard trodden with worldly business?—Is it not in

our own power instead of being shallow and half-hearted, to be earnest and true in our secret trying after the things of religion, so that they may take deep root within us? Is it not in our own power to clear out the briars and thorns of this world's cares and pleasures, and to have our hearts in that state, which the Saviour calls "honest and good;" which will understand the word, receive it, and keep it; so that with patience we may bring forth the fruits of a good life?

It is true that this power is from God. So also is the sunshine and the shower, which comes down from heaven, alike on every soil. God never withholds from his creatures the power to serve Him if they will.

If we diligently attend to all this, we shall not be left untaught, and if we are taught of God, one of the fruits that we shall assuredly bear, is that which makes the second thing which should follow the rightly receiving this parable of our Lord Jesus Christ. This second thing is, to do all we can to help forward the sowing the good seed around us. No words of our's can be called good seed. No, it must be the word of God, and the sowing of this we ought to help forward by every means in our power. There are many means besides preaching, which belongs alone to God's appointed Ministers. We may all help to make ready the soil. We do so when we teach, or in any way help to teach little children and grown-up people how to read the Bible. We do so when we give Bibles and religious books, which show people how to watch their hearts.* We do so, when we give as we are able, to help

* The giving of religious books has often been wonderfully blessed to the effectual sowing of the good seed of the word. Often has it lain long without sign of life, but it has taken root at last and brought forth abundant fruit. I remember a curious and very encouraging example of this. A long time ago, one friend gave to another a strikingly-written book explaining what Christianity really is. The book was carefully put away in a box, *without being read, and it was forgotten*. Many years afterwards, the box was accidentally opened, the book found, and without being read, given to another friend. This

forward the preaching of Christ's kingdom in our own country, and in far-off lands. Let us lay these things to heart, and earnestly pray for the blessing of God upon the soil and upon the seed.

Prayer.

O God, my heart is before thee. Make it as the garden of the Lord, rich and fruitful in every Christian grace. Fit and prepare me by thy Providence to receive the good seed of the word. Oh let not the world have power to tread down and harden the affections of my heart till it becomes like the common way-side, fit for nothing but the traffic of worldly business. Suffer not this to be. By *whatever* means thou seest needful, rouse up my soul to the great interests of the life that never ends, and open up the soil of my heart to receive the good seed of thy word. Let not Satan or his ministers of sin

last read it, and was so much struck by its contents, that she gave it to a brother who was going to India, making him promise that he would read it. This brother was a young man of very uncommon talent, of fine mind, but of unsettled principle. His heart was softened by the natural grief of leaving home. The book showed him his own state as he was, and it showed him also what was the state he must attain, before he could bring forth fruits acceptable to God. The book was full of God's word, and it led him to the great store-house of good seed, to the Bible itself. He studied it with deep self-abasement, and with fervent prayer. Before his long voyage was ended he was an altered man, a new creature. He had risen above the ambitions of earth. His only desire was to labour in God's vineyard. This it was not the design of the All-wise God he should live to do. But he lived long enough to be the means of turning many to righteousness. To every word that came from him to his far-off home, there was given a power to rouse and to convince. In his own family, to old and young, his letters were greatly blessed; and one, his most intimate friend, became through his means so impressed with the great truths of religion, that he too changed his views in life, and lived to carry out in the Ministry that labour in Christ's vineyard which death prevented the other from beginning. He died, blessing God for that little book that had been so long forgotten! Perhaps, though it has now given place in religious libraries to many others, it may be well to name it. It was "Bowman's First Principles of Christianity, in Letters addressed to a young man."

have power to take it away from me ; but for the love of thy dear Son, who hath given us this word, let me have grace to bring forth fruit abundantly.

FOR THE STONY GROUND.

Give me, oh our Father, that earnest faith, in which alone, as in a deep soil, can grow the hidden root of holy obedience. Give me truly to believe that nothing is of real value but the things belonging to thy kingdom, which, though we see not yet, Christ our Lord hath brought within our reach. So shall my *hidden life with Christ*, as a deep root, draw strength and power from the deep soil of Christian faith, and so shall I be able to bring forth the fruits of a holy life, though affliction and persecution may arise ; and in the time of temptation I shall not fall away, for I shall be rooted and grounded in Christ the Lord.

FOR THE THORNS.

Thou knowest, blessed Lord, how many things there are that will choke thy word and make it unfruitful, unless thou give me strength to struggle against them. Oh how sharp are the thorns of the cares of this life ! How they wound my heart while they choke the good seed of thy word ! Thou knowest the struggle ; and the cure thou alone canst give. More faith, more earnest faith, that I may cast all my care on thee. But besides my cares, even in this careful world, I am in danger from its pleasures. The fear to have not, the desire to have, the sinful use of those things thou hast given, these, all like the bind-weed, choke the good seed of thy word within me. Oh rouse me up by thy Holy Spirit to root them out, and to give myself wholly to thee, for it is most true that I cannot serve God and mammon.

FOR THE GOOD GROUND.

Blessed be thy name, O holy God, it is possible to be in this
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world, and not to be choked by its cares, or to be hardened by its business. It is possible to be rich, and not to be deceived by riches, to be poor and yet free from care. I bring my heart to thee in faith, that thou wilt root out of it all that hinders the life of my soul, that thou wilt warm it by the sunshine of thy love, that thou wilt send thy Holy Spirit, like the gentle dew, to soften my affections. Oh fit and prepare me to receive thy word. Sow it abundantly within me, and cause me abundantly to bring forth the fruits of holiness to thy power and glory. For Jesus Christ's dear sake. Amen.

XXXVI.

MARK IV. 21—29.

When our Lord had ended the parables of the sower, we find in the Gospel of St. Mark nearly the same words repeated as are written in Matthew v. 15, and they come in here with great force, for they seem to say to the disciples, "If the good seed takes root in your hearts, and brings forth fruit, the effect will be, that you will in your turn see that it is sown abundantly in the hearts of others." The light of true religion once kindled, let them take care that they made it so shine out, as to drive away the darkness of ignorance. Therefore—

MARK IV. 21, 22. *"He said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick? For there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad."*

If the light of religion is really in a man's heart, it will, and must, shine out in his life. The good seed cannot remain buried in a good soil, it will show the life that is within it, by

springing up into the light. All things in nature seek the light. If you place a stone upon the grass, so that air and light are shut out from the plants on which it is laid, you will soon see that the blades will push themselves sideways till they have found the light, and then they will spring up in it. If you shut up a plant in a room so darkened that scarce a ray of light can enter in, you will find that the branches will bend forward to seek that ray of light, forcing aside, or bringing with them, according to their strength, whatever would hinder them. So is it in the things of nature ; so is it in the things belonging to religion. They cannot be hid, they seek the light, and in doing so they draw others to that light. No plant, but a dead one, will remain quietly in the darkness ; and if there is true religion in a man's heart, it will show itself by seeking to know God more and more, and to share with others the blessings of the light of truth. Again our Lord repeats the solemn warning.

MARK iv. 23. "*If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.*"

This cannot too often be repeated, nor the words that follow :

Verses 24, 25. "*And He saith unto them, Take heed what ye hear : with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you ; and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given : and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.*"

If we keep our thoughts upon the picture of the seed and the soil, all this will be plain and easy to understand. If we have a fruitful garden, good soil, that brings forth well, we take more pains with it, and thus, as it were, give it back the good it gives to us. It is worth our trouble, we do not grudge what we spend upon it. But we treat very differently a barren and bad soil. If, after we have done all we can for it, it still has not made us any return, then we leave it to itself, in fact we

take away from it even that which it had, for we turn it out of our garden, and leave it to the waste.

When all pains have been taken with the best soil, and good seed well sown in it, the farmer and the gardener know that it must be left in faith. They can do no more. Of this Jesus reminds his disciples.

MARK iv. 26—29. *“ And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground ; and should sleep, and rise, night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself ; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.”*

God, who produced the seed at first, will give power to the earth to bring it forth again much more abundantly, in a plentiful harvest. And God, who gave the word, will give it life in the heart of man, and its fruit shall be seen in the great harvest of eternal life.

There is a blessing hid in these few words, “ when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come,” and the more we think of the meaning of the verse, the more do we see the comfort that is in it. The sickle that reaps the corn is death, but it is not put in till the grain is ripe. Does not this shew us that the child of God shall not die till, in him, all Christian truths have been ripened into fruits ? That the faithful shall not be taken away while yet the work of grace is imperfect within them ? Does it not show that there is a kind care which orders and delays the moment of death till the work within them be fully done, for it is only “ when the fruit is brought forth,” that Christ “ putteth in the sickle.” Here is an answer of peace to the question we sometimes ask in agony of mind, when we see those we love

enduring the pains of a long, lingering death. Oh why must this suffering be? why so long? The fruit is ripening. These pains of body, that distress of mind, they are all needful, though *we* see not why. They will cease when the great work within is fully done. For we have the words of Christ himself, that “when the *fruit* is brought forth, *immediately* he putteth in the sickle.” If we are the children of God,—and we may know whether we are His children by the sign that our greatest wish is that His will may be done—we may, through life and in death, rest in this happy trust that He will order all things well for the growth and the ripening of our fitness for the kingdom of heaven. “First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.” And when death carries from our arms one dearer to us than our own lives, one who, we trusted, would have cheered *us* in *our* way to heaven, let this thought silence our grief; the fruit was ripe, to leave it would have hurt it, for the harvest was come.

This is truth in the private circle of our homes. It is truth of God’s great family, the Universal Church. Christ has left the Divine seed, which He has planted in his Church, to grow on by night and by day, through storm and sunshine; still, through every hindrance, and every difficulty, secretly gaining power; and so will He let it go on, till it has brought to perfect ripeness all its appointed fruit. Then, and not till then, when the harvest of the world is fully ripe, and all God’s children have been brought into his family, will Christ again, the second time, appear unto salvation, and thrust in his sickle, and reap the earth, gathering the wheat into his barns.*

Prayer.

O God, I hear! Give me grace to take heed how I hear. Give me that earnest longing for the light of truth that cannot be satisfied with any thing but the truth. Give me the power

* Trench.

and the will to seek thee the light of my soul, amidst darkness and error and ignorance, and let me bring with me to the light all that are within my reach, and give me faith to trust thee. The good seed of the word is thine, thou wilt care for its growth. Let me then have grace to work all I can, and faith, to leave to thee, in holy simple trust, my imperfect work, knowing that thou wilt bless it, not for any goodness that is in it, but because thou hast commanded us to use all means, and to leave the fruit to thee. To thee my God I turn; for thee I desire to labour. I must sleep and wake, night and day, but thy power knows no rest, thou art ever working, and thou wilt soon bring about the harvest-day. Oh, in that day, in pitying love remember me, and because thy Son has died for the sinful and the weak, have mercy on me, thy weak and sinful creature. Amen.

XXXVII.

The Lord Jesus had not yet ended the lessons that might be learnt from the sower and the seed. Still speaking from the boat, to the crowds listening on the shore, He showed them in another parable, that not only there was bad as well as good ground in the world, but that there was another sower at work, Satan the evil one, who laboured secretly to sow bad seed among the good, and thus to destroy the harvest.

MATTHEW xiii. 24—30. *“ Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field : but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field ? from whence then*

hath it tares ? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up ? But he said, Nay ; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest : and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them : but gather the wheat into my barn."

We cannot read this parable without seeing that it is full of meaning. The disciples of the Lord Jesus felt this, and when that night "they went into the house,"

Verse 36. "*His disciples came unto him, saying, Declare (or explain) unto us the parable of the tares of the field.*"

It will be best for us to read his answer now.

Verses 37—43. "*He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man : the field is the world : the good seed are the children of the kingdom ; but the tares are the children of the wicked one : the enemy that sowed them is the devil : the harvest is the end of the world ; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity ; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."*

Again our Lord repeats the solemn call, "who hath ears to hear, let him hear." Surely we shall do well not to pass at

once from the parable, but to ponder its meaning explained by himself.

From his own lips we learn "He that sowed the good seed is the Son of man."

This is the name which the Lord Jesus gives to himself oftener than any other, though, as we have read in John v., "He said that God was his Father, making himself equal with God," and that at his voice "all that are in the graves shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." Yet He is the *Son of man*, and it is in this character that He is to win back the world which Adam lost, therefore He constantly takes to himself this name, which binds him the more closely to us. Others do not give it him; for only once He is called the Son of man by any but himself. That once was by Stephen in the moment of his death, when "he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." (Acts vii. 56.) The name being given him at that moment, shows us, better than words can tell, how endearing is the bond that binds him to us. Surely it gave Stephen courage to die, when he saw Jesus, the Son of man, standing in the form of man ready to welcome him to the right hand of God! As the Son of man, Jesus has won the battle for us, and it is as the Son of man He carries on all the work that has still to be done in the world, which has been given him for His own, and where Satan is ever fighting against him.

We must keep these things in remembrance while we go over this parable, and read that "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man which sowed good seed in his field." Christ brought the kingdom of heaven down upon the earth, and the good seed He has continually sown in the hearts of men has taken so deep a root in those who have gladly been taught by him, that in this parable He calls the good seed "the children of the kingdom," for the plant is growing; the *word* and the *fruit*

of the word, is spoken of as one and the same thing.* “The field” in which they are planted “is the world.” The Lord Jesus knew that the word of his “Gospel should go forth into all lands, and should be sown in every part of the great out-field of the nations.’† “But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.” Our Lord did not invent this way of doing mischief, and showing spite and revenge. Those who heard him knew well what He meant; for it was a crime as common among them as setting fire to stacks and ricks of corn is common among us. Even now, in the land of the East, if a wicked man is angry with his neighbour, he will watch the time and place where he sows his seed, and then in the night he will cast in among it the seed of a most troublesome weed, which grows with the crop, and causes much damage and vexation.

The enemy in the parable, Christ tells us, is the Devil, and the tares he sowed are those who, taught by him, hide the growth of the good seed, and are called “the children of the wicked one.” It will be well for us to take notice how Satan is more and more clearly shown in the clearer light of the Gospel than he was in the Old Testament. In it he is always spoken of as a tempter to evil, and in the book of Job he describes himself as “going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it,” (Job i. 7.) but the instant that Christ begins his ministry for the setting up of the kingdom of God, at the same instant Satan starts forward as its hinderer and enemy. We should observe too that he is spoken of as *HIS* enemy, the enemy of the Son of man. Here we see the truth of that sentence spoken by God in the very beginning, that He would put enmity, or strife, and hatred, between Satan and the seed of the woman. This promise has been working all the while since the fall of man, and now it comes out to the open light, and we shall see the strife waxing fiercer and fiercer till

* Trench.

† Ibid.

the end. It was necessary for Satan's overthrow, that man, who lost the battle, should also win it. And Christ, in the nature of man, as the second Adam, was the object of Satan's especial fear and hatred. (1 Cor. xv. 21, 22.) He was therefore always on the watch, as it were, to sow tares among his wheat—to spoil his work, whatever it was. It is written in the parable, that when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, *then* appeared the tares also." From this we learn, that what is bad does not always seem bad at first; indeed it is a sad truth, that the greatest mischief is often done by those things which in their beginning have had the appearance of the greatest good; and it is for this reason men must watch, namely, lest, when they least suspect it, tares shall be found in the place of wheat. It is by the *fruits* that the bad shall be known from the good.

In the whole history of the world, from the very beginning even to this our day, if we think it over, we must see that wherever and whenever God has sown the good seed, Satan has immediately followed to sow the bad. And still there has been the same pretence of a greater good. God had given to Adam, the first man, and to Eve, perfect happiness; Satan immediately promised them a happiness greater still, that was to make them "as gods, knowing good and evil." This promise of his was the first sowing of tares among the wheat in God's field, "which is the world;" the blade has sprung up, the fruit of both sorts has appeared, and they still grow together till the end of the world.

And still has Satan sowed, and still does he go on to sow. When the whole world was drowned, and none but Noah the servant of God and his family were left alive, surely we might think that the field was thoroughly cleansed, and none but good seed left in it. Satan was at hand. Fast he sowed the tares, and fast they grew. The pure religion of God was soon lost among the nations that were born from the children of Noah.

They made to themselves images to represent God, and so idolatry soon took the place of true religion, for they worshipped these images and forgot the living God.* Satan had sown the tares. And when God had called Abraham to be his own servant and friend, and made from his children one people to be taught his word, and to keep it pure, among them also Satan sowed the tares. When God gave prophets filled by his Holy Spirit to deliver them his messages of love and warning, Satan filled false prophets with his lying spirit to deceive the people. And so has it ever been. When in after-times, religion was purified among the Jews,† and the servants of God were held in honour, then Satan planted the tares of hypocrisy, and almost *destroyed religion by raising in men's hearts the pride of being thought religious*. After Christ our Lord had finished his work, and left the world to return to his Father's throne, even while his apostles yet lived, among the good seed of Christianity, Satan planted tares, and they have been growing ever since, and they are growing now in all the false doctrines that disturb the peace of God's kingdom on earth. If we will observe, we shall see that wherever and whenever there is an awakening to any good, immediately there springs up beside it an answering evil, that seems somehow to belong to it, or rather to have sprung up with it, as if on very purpose to hinder its good. Truly "the field is the world," and in it Christ is

* The desire to represent the unseen God by an image made by man's hands, seems to have been the cause of the different idolatries that have filled, and still do fill the earth. Fear for the *power* of that great Being whose *love* they did not comprehend, filled men's minds, and from this cause the idols they have made are almost always hideous and terrible; and the worship they offer them full of cruelty and blood, sacrificing to them human victims and little children. Besides this, when men died who had been loved and honoured for their wisdom or for any great quality, it was common so to worship their memory, that out of this soon grew another sort of idolatry. This has been, and still is, a fruitful source of evil.

† After the return from the captivity in Babylon.

always sowing good seed, and Satan, his enemy, is always sowing tares.

In the parable, it is written that when the servants saw that tares were springing up among the wheat, and had been told that an enemy had sown them there, they said unto their master, "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" Even the servants of God are too apt to think that by force, or at least by using their power, they may root out the mischiefs that creep into the service of God. It seems natural to the heart of men to wish to *oblige* others to be of the same mind in religion as themselves; but God does not entrust men with such power, and therefore the master of the field to this proposal of his servants, answered, "Nay." This refusal is so clear, so express, and so plain, that we may feel sure, wherever we see a spirit that would persecute men for religion's sake, that it is not of God. The reason for the refusal is given, "Lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them." God only, who is the searcher of hearts, can certainly know who are his. He only can make no mistake.

There have been at all times so many opinions among men as to what was the true doctrine and what the false, which was the wheat, and which the tares, that if the servants, that is, those who had power, were, each party in their turn, to root out what *they* believed to be the tares, there would soon be no wheat left in the field. Where man has been allowed to persecute his fellow-man for the sake of religion, much cruelty and wrong have at all times been done, and many true servants of Christ have lost their lives, for while men thought they were gathering up the tares only, they were rooting up also the wheat with them.

It is not that the tares shall never be plucked up, but that *this* is not the time, and the servants are not to be the doers of this work. "Let both grow together until the harvest."

said the master of the field, and the Lord Jesus explains that "the harvest is the end of the world." From this we learn, that while the world lasts there must always be evil found in it, even in God's Church. Both the good seed, and the bad, are to grow, till they come to a head, till they are ripe, one for destruction, and the other for full salvation. And they are to grow together; the Church must have in it a mixture of good and bad till the end of time. Does not this seem to tell us, that men should not separate themselves from it because that tares are growing with the wheat. Let us remember, that even in the best men there is the same mixture of good and evil as there is outwardly in the Church, and that every attempt to set up a little Church of our own, in which we fondly hope there is nothing but wheat, is plainly going against the meaning of this parable of our blessed Lord, and is also encouraging the growth of the tares of spiritual pride and self-deceit in our own hearts, and in the hearts of those who are joined with us.

"In the time of harvest," said our Lord, when He explained the parable, "I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."

Not till the end of the world shall the good be parted from the bad—and then the Lord of the field and of the harvest shall send forth his reapers, not his earthly ministering servants, but "his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity." The right meaning of the word which is put into English as *offend*, is rather *entrap*, so as to cause to fall, and all who have wilfully disturbed men's minds, and cause them to fall into error in religion, shall share the same fate as they who commit iniquity, that is, who live in known sin. What this fate is we are told in words which are both sad and solemn, and which may well fill us with fear: "And (the angels) shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Oh, well may they wail—shut out from God—in pain of body—in anguish of mind—all hope lost for ever.

But when this is done, the wheat is gathered into the barn. Hark to the words of our Lord! "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the Sun in the kingdom of their Father." As *fire* fills the dark, cruel kingdom of hell, so light fills the pure heavenly kingdom.

Then when the darkness of sin, and ignorance, and error, which hindered God's children, in the time of their mortal life, is taken away, the light—the holy light of love and truth which all the time was struggling within them, shall shine forth in its full brightness. All shall see and know that they are the children of that God who is "the Father of lights," (James i. 17,) for they shall shine forth as the sun when the clouds are rolled away. Oh that *we*, that you and I, may be of that kingdom of light!*

Prayer.

O holy Saviour, we are full of darkness and of sin; kindle now within us, we beseech thee thy Divine light. Oh let thy Holy Spirit shine into our hearts, that, taught of thee, we may know which are the tares, and which the wheat, and so may be kept from falling into error. Give us wisdom and grace to watch over our hearts, for Satan, our enemy and thine, is ever at hand to destroy and hinder thy work. Have mercy now, blessed Lord, upon us and upon those who are dear to us, that at thy harvest-day, not one we love may be found among the tares, but that we may all, a joyful and a perfect band, not one left out, be received into the kingdom of our Father, through thy intercession, O holy and adored, and in thy light may we shine forth for ever as the sun, in the brightness of thy righteousness. Amen.

* The sense of the whole of this number is taken from Trench on the Parable of the Tares. Wherever it has been possible, I have used his very words.

XXXVIII.

MATT. XIII. 31. MARK IV. 30. LUKE XIII. 18.

Still the Lord Jesus spoke from the little boat, and still the people listened from the shore.

MATTHEW xiii. 31, 32. *“ Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field : Which indeed is the least of all seeds : but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.”*

According to St. Luke, the Lord Jesus, before He spoke this parable, said, “ Unto what is the kingdom of God like ? and whereunto shall I resemble (or compare) it ? It is like a grain of mustard-seed, &c.” Now, if we attentively consider the parable, we shall soon see why He chose this comparison. “ Small as a grain of mustard-seed,” was a proverb among the Jews, when they meant to express the exceeding smallness of something of which they spoke ; yet they knew well that this little seed, when planted, grew into the largest of their herbs, so large indeed that its branches had strength to bear the weight of flocks of birds, that crowded to it to eat the seed which they were fond of as food. The Jews knew this, and they often saw them lodging in the branches.

We must not think of the mustard that grows in our own gardens, though even that, left to grow to its full height, in a deep and rich soil, will become a much larger and stronger plant than we are used to see. In the hot countries of the east, there is a tree called the mustard-tree, which reaches such a size, that it is strong enough for a man to climb into its

branches,* and travellers tell that they have passed on horse-back under them. The plant therefore was chosen by our Lord as a sign from which He might teach the people that his kingdom, which, beginning in his single self, was at first, "small as a mustard-seed," yet, as time went on, should gain strength and size to gather all the nations of the earth into it. Christ, when laid in the grave, was planted as a seed in the earth; and his enemies hoped that He was buried out of sight for ever, but from that grave, He arose, and this kingdom of God, as a tree, has been growing ever since, all false religion gradually giving way before it. And it shall grow till every people and nation shall be sheltered beneath its branches, [for we have a sure promise, that the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea. Isa. ii. 9. Hab. ii. 14.

So also is the growth of Christ's religion in every heart that receives it with humble faith. "Small as a grain of mustard-seed" in the beginning, who can tell its power when once it is planted! Some verse of Scripture, carried by the Spirit of God deep into the heart—perhaps a few words dropped by a friend—perhaps a religious book—often none of these, but an awful feeling that comes we know not how, but surely from God, that there is no safety but through the Redeemer. Each of these, if rooted in the heart, will certainly become so strong, that nothing will hinder its progress, till growing as it were into a great tree, it shall fill the whole heart, and every thought and every wish, like the birds of the air, shall find rest and food in its branches. Do we know something of this growth of the kingdom of heaven within us? Can we look back to the time when our desire to belong to God was small indeed? Do we feel good hope that it is always growing stronger and stronger within us? Let us watch over its increase; for our happiness, in time and in eternity, depends upon its becoming a great tree.

* Irby and Mangles. On this subject see Biblical Cyclopedia.

It has been thought that there may have been another reason for the Lord Jesus having chosen the mustard-tree as a comparison; for there are many other great trees which spring from very small seeds; and it has been supposed that this second reason is full of meaning.* Both the seed of the mustard-plant, and its leaves, and indeed every part of it, *when bruised*, give forth their virtues. It is then that the strength of the plant comes out, and its value is seen. So has it ever been with the true church of Christ. So is it with His holy religion wherever it has been planted, in nations, and in each man's heart. Sorrow, and trouble, and persecution, instead of destroying it, bring out its strength and power. Mustard when bruised can be mistaken for nothing else, and religion, when tried by affliction, shows at once its heavenly nature, different from all that earth can teach. All other comfort perishes under the crush of sorrow, but it is then that Christ's holy religion gives forth His Divine Spirit, and shows from whom it came.

Prayer.

O God, my Saviour, I trust that the desire to be thine, is planted in my heart. It is no part of my nature, it is from thee. Watch over the growth of this small seed, I beseech thee, and grant that it may become as a great tree. Grant that every thought, that every wish of my heart may be brought into its branches, that all my desires being strengthened by thy religion, they may rest in thee for ever. Amen.

XXXIX.

MATTHEW xiii. 33. "*Another parable spake he* (Jesus)

* See Trench on the Parables, p. 106, and the note referring to Augustine and to Ambrose, on the Martyrdom of St. Lawrence. Also Olshausen, p. 158.

unto them ; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."

The parable of the grain of mustard-seed was to teach the people that, as from a small seed grew the greatest of their herbs, so the kingdom of Christ, from a small beginning, should grow till its power should openly fill the earth. This parable of the leaven was to teach them the power that was in the religion of Christ, to *change* whatever it touched into a *new nature*. Whether in a single heart, or whether in the character of a whole nation, if true Christian religion is hid within it, from the very beginning it will go on silently working till the change is complete.

Nothing can better explain the meaning of the parable than the parable itself. Let any one watch how leaven (or yeast,) works in the flour which it makes into bread, and he will see what a change is going on. The person who is in charge takes the leaven or yeast, and mixes it well with the dough, and then leaves it to do its part. By and by a few bells of air, rising up, show that it is working ; fermentation is going on. In a very little time the whole is leavened. The heavy mass has risen into light and wholesome bread that only has to be kneaded into loaves and put into the oven to be ready for use. How great is the change ! How silently it has worked ! Even so worked the leaven of Christianity in the early times after Christ. The rulers of the earth took little note of the change that was going on. They looked upon the Christians as a despised and persecuted race ; they little dreamed that their faith, like leaven hid in three measures of meal, was silently but surely making its way in changing men's minds. The heathen writers of that time show in the books they have left, that they had no idea of what was going on below the outside quiet. The leaven was hidden ; yet by degrees it made itself felt, till at length the

whole Roman world was more or less leavened by it ; and that mighty nation, which had cruelly persecuted the Christians, became Christian, and sent holy men among all people to carry to them the leaven of Christ's religion ; that it might work among them the same wondrous change. And it did work, and it shall work till the end of time, when at last "*the whole is leavened,*" for these words must be looked upon as a prophecy of the day which is surely coming, when the mind of Christ shall spread itself through all people and nations, and purify and ennoble all life.

As silent, as sure, and as great, is the change the true religion of Christ works in every heart. Most beautiful and most true is the comparison of leaven hid in the meal till the whole is leavened. The leaven or yeast is different from the dough. Brought from elsewhere to be mixed with it, when once it is safely hidden within it, it begins to work, and it goes on till the whole is leavened. But it is hidden—it only shews itself by the change it brings about. Even so the gospel of Christ is a new and quickening power. Cast into an old and dying world, it roused up in it the energy, strength, and power of youth. Received into a heart that has been as it were dead, cold to all God's love, careless of all but worldly good, this sacred leaven searches into every part, making itself felt in all. It shall not cease from working there till it has brought the whole man into obedience to it. The dead in sin become alive in Christ, for the parable of the leaven doth set forth to us as in a picture, the secret, powerful working of the Holy Spirit, which leaves no part of man's sinful nature unchanged, and makes of him a new creature in Christ Jesus.

How often have I seen this wondrous change ! the proud hard heart become meek and lowly ; the rash and careless changed into the anxious enquirer. Those to whom the fear of death had been a life-long bondage, filled with glad hope of heaven ; all things changed, for "*the whole was leavened.*"

And why? Because the gospel of Christ had been hidden in the heart, and His Holy Spirit, which is the life-giving power of that Gospel, had worked the mighty change.*

* Perhaps nothing can give a clearer idea of the change wrought by the working of the heaven of God's truth, than a circumstance which happened some years ago. It will be best to give it in the words of the person to whom it happened, as I have them by me written down. This may perhaps make the story too long, but all its details are striking and useful, and I know them to be true, for we knew the people concerned, and in the end, were able to see how really great was the change which had been wrought by the secret working of the heaven of the word of God.

The account of it is this, as given to me some years ago :

"One morning being uncertain of my way, I went into a cottage to ask for a guide. There was lying there a woman, old, sick, and helpless. She was the mother of the owner of the cottage, and his wife said she had been bedridden for many years. I spoke to her, and found that though very silent, and even as it seemed to me, very stupid, she liked to be taken notice of. The young and happy pity the old and infirm; it seemed a grievous case to be lying there, little cared for by any one, as was too easy to be seen, for the daughter-in-law spoke with the greatest indifference of the poor old creature. It soon became a great interest to me to visit her. I had been well taught the *doctrines* of religion, but was in reality quite ignorant of religion itself, for I looked upon it as a thing most necessary indeed for safety in DEATH, but that had little to do with daily LIFE. I knew this woman could not live long, for besides having had already two paralytic attacks, she was above seventy. It therefore seemed very important to find out if she knew where to find pardon for her sins. She had always gone, she said, when she could to Church, and had very often received the Sacrament. Great then was my surprize and alarm to find that all she knew of religion was this, that there was a God, and that He made her. Even this knowledge was dark and misty. She had no idea of God as a Father, or even as a Judge. Of the Saviour, the Redeemer, she knew *nothing whatever*. To every question she answered "Yes," she had heard the name of Jesus, but she did not know who He was, and it was too clear she did not care. We scarcely knew the clergyman of the Parish, and did not feel authorized to go to him on such a subject. So it was agreed that as I had the most time to spare, I was to read to her from the Bible, and from good books. Almost every day this was done. She listened because she could not help it, but it seemed that she took in the sense no more than the bed on which she lay. Her mind, which had never been a bright one, had been almost quite stupified by having been so many years unused; for there the poor creature had lain, not able to read, and scarcely ever spoken to by any one. She seemed even to have no very clear remembrance of her past life, though she said she used to go to Church because the

It has been thought that, by the woman in the parable, is meant the Church of Christ, which takes the leaven of His word

Parson told her it was right; for the same reason she had gone to the Sacrament. *And for another reason too; she had a share of the Sacrament money given her when she went.* All this was very discouraging, but the more I read the more earnest I grew, for I was very much afraid for her, and beginning to be *not a little afraid for myself.* This went on with only short interruptions for fully a year; we then left home, intending to be some time absent. We were sorry to leave the old woman, though we could not make out that she had understood or cared for a single word that she had heard. We feared she would die while we were away, and felt very sad about her. We had little need.

“It was nine months before we returned home. The next day I made haste to the cottage. It was empty, and the door was fastened. No doubt she was dead? No, the family had moved, and a neighbour told me where to find them. The daughter-in-law received me with a most smiling welcome, and immediately began to speak of the old mother with a kindly feeling she had never shewn before. “You will find her quite changed,” she said, “she talks very much to us all now, and indeed we find her a great blessing.” So surprized, that I scarcely understood her meaning, I followed her into the inner room, where lay our old friend. Changed indeed! Yes, she *was changed*, for the dead had become alive! There was no longer that heavy, unmeaning look that had never smiled when I came, never had seemed to care when I went. Her whole face grew bright as she held out her hand to me, as she said, “God bless you, I thank Him and bless Him that I have lived to see you again.” So surprized, that I could not answer her, I sat down to listen, while she poured out to me the most truly Christian feeling. In scripture language, she confessed her many sins, spoke of His love, her gratitude to God her Father in heaven, for having given His own and only Son to be her Saviour, and then with tears she said that she felt safe in Christ, and believed that His blood had washed her sins away. What had happened? Who had been with her? I thought some good and gifted clergyman had undertaken her case, and devoted much time to her, and had prayed by her. No, it had not been so. Not a page, not a verse had been read to her by any one. Sabbath after Sabbath the prayers of the Church had indeed gone up for “all sick persons,” and for widows—and she was both, but no *particular* prayer had been made for her, for her case was not known. Her own account of the change that had come upon her was short and simple, but oh how full of solemn meaning; “After you were gone,” she said, “I lay in my bed speaking to nobody, and nobody speaking to me, just as I did before you came, but it was a different thing to me, for I tried to think. I thought of all the words I had heard, and they came back to me quite clear, much clearer than when I heard them. I seemed to understand them better. All through the day, and often in the night, they used to rise up in me. Then I tried to pray:

given by Him, and by means of the Sacraments, and by many different ways of teaching, gives it to those who have it not. This cannot be better expressed than in the words of a holy man of old times—"May the Holy Church, which is figured under the type of this woman in the gospel, whose meal we are, hide the Lord Jesus in the innermost places of our hearts, till the warmth of the Divine wisdom reaches into the most secret recesses * of our souls." †

Before we leave this parable, it will be well to observe that leaven in this place *only*, is used in Scripture as a type of *good*. In many other parts it is used as a figure, by which is expressed something evil; (1 Cor. v. 7. Luke xii. 1. Gal. v. 9.), and in the old law the children of Israel were commanded to put out of their houses every particle of leaven during the Passover week; (Exod.), because it was then used as a sign of the old bad nature, perhaps because, as every one knows, leaven (not at first I did not know scarcely how, but soon I could, and always as I prayed I grew less frightened and more happy, and I understood better all that God had been doing for me, and every day He is teaching me more and more, and I am quite happy, for I know that the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, is my Saviour, and that He loves me, and helps me, and will help me, to the end." What was this but the teaching of the Holy Spirit? The leaven had been brought and hid in her heart, and the whole was leavened. For four years this woman lived, a bright light shining in a dark place; her faith, her piety, her humble, happy hope in Christ the Lord, were made a blessing to many. Her neighbours who could read, often came to read to her; her son, who had been taught in the village school when he was a boy, rubbed up his learning, and used, when his work was done, and on Sundays, to sit by her bed and read verses to her as he could. The interest of the whole family was awakened. Perhaps the whole lump may be leavened!

"Shortly after our return, we removed to a distant part of the country, and never shall I forget the solemn farewell of my old friend. She exhorted me to hold fast by that word of God which His Holy Spirit had made the life of her soul, and would make the life of mine. We heard of her from time to time; she remained bright, happy, and patient to the last, and died full of years and infirmities, but fuller still of faith and joyful hope."

Surely this little history, which is simply and exactly true, well explains the parable of the leaven as applied to particular cases.

* Recesses, or secret places.

† St. Ambrose, quoted by Trench.

yeast,) is a part of the old dough left from some former baking till it is sour. By the command to put away all that remained of it, the people were reminded of their need to put away from their hearts all workings of malice and wickedness, if they would rightly serve God.

But the Lord Jesus has used the figure of leaven in a very different sense. He has made it for ever a sign to the thoughtful, of the working of his Holy Spirit within the believing heart. And each time that we take a morsel of bread in our hands, we may see in it a type of the saving change which He is ready and willing to work in all who seek it, for He has solemnly said, that his Father in heaven will give his Holy Spirit to all who ask him for it. (Luke xi. 13.)

How great is the kindness of our Lord, who has in these parables given a deep religious meaning to the common things of life! The labours of the field, the household work, speak to us of the kingdom of heaven: and the birds in the air above us, and the flowers that blossom round our feet, tell us that we may safely trust His care for all our wants. He knows that by far the greatest number of his children are without human learning, that many books are to them an impossibility; therefore He speaks in words so simple that a child may understand; and therefore He hath, as it were, written the story of his love on almost every thing we see, on almost every thing we touch.

Oh bless the Lord with me! Let us fall down and praise his holy name for ever.

Prayer.

O God, my Saviour, bless thy holy word to the teaching of my heart. Make the leaven of thy religion so to work within me, that my whole nature may be changed—that I may serve thee in every thing I do, see thee in all thy works, and love thee, my God and Saviour, with all the powers thou hast given me, for ever and ever. Amen.

XL.

Now when these parables were ended, the evening must have been far spent, the night must have been coming on.

MATTHEW xiii. 36. "*Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house : and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.*"

We have already heard his answer, and considered the explanation He gave them of each of the three parables He had spoken from the boat ; of the different soils on which the seed of the word was sown ; of the tares, and of the mustard-seed. He told the meaning of these to his disciples at night, when alone in the house ; and at night, when we are alone, though we cannot see him, He will still tell us many things. He will make many things clear to us which, perhaps, we have but half understood, and so imprint them upon our hearts that we shall not forget them. When we have been listening to the teaching of God's word through the day, let us, before we lie down in our beds, think over all we have heard, and simply ask the Saviour to teach us rightly to understand it. Perhaps He will do more. Perhaps He will add to what we have heard, clearer lessons from his word of our own particular duties. Perhaps, in the quiet hour of night, when the labors of the day are done, when the voices of men are hushed, and *their* opinions no longer bewilder *ours*, perhaps, in that still hour, the Lord Jesus may, in answer to our prayers, shed so bright a light on the truths of his coming kingdom, that we may see and feel of how little worth are all these things the world thinks of so much value. Perhaps He may teach us then, that the salvation of our souls is worth far more than earth can

give. That if the kingdom of heaven is but ours, we need care little for all those things which, in the bustle and business of the day, are so apt to fill our minds with vain wishes, and with fretting discontent.

It was thus the Lord Jesus taught his disciples. They came to him for an explanation of the parables He had already spoken. He gave it, and He gave them more, for He said unto them :—

MATTHEW xiii. 44. *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field ; the which when a man findeth, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.”*

Even now, in the land of the East, it is not a very uncommon thing for a man to find hidden treasure ; and, in Eastern tales, we often read how that a man has found a buried treasure, and has, in a moment, risen from poverty to great riches. This has been caused by the unsettled state of the country, and the many changes that have been in it. Men have often been obliged in haste to leave their dwelling-places, and for safety they often buried their money and jewels, and other valuable things, which they could not take with them. They never told any one the place, so that if they died before they could return, then was their treasure lost entirely to their families ; often never found at all ; unless by chance some poor man digging in his field should light upon it.*

The parable describes the joy that would fill the mind of the finder of the hidden treasure, and his anxious haste to get possession of it ; his fear of losing it, and his willingness to part with all he had to buy that field. Often he had carelessly

* By the laws of our country, and indeed by the laws of common honesty, money or any thing else found in like manner in this country would not belong to the finder, but to the owner of the place in which it was found, or more properly speaking to the lord of the manor ; and the man who kept the matter secret, and took possession of what he had found, would be in some sort a thief, and would always be afraid of being found out.

walked over it; he had no thought of the treasure that was in it—but now that he knows it, he cannot rest till he has made it his own. Even so is the kingdom of heaven. It has always been close at hand, for the Lord Jesus Christ brought it unto us, (Luke xvii. 21,) and it is among us, but we knew it not, we thought not of it. Has God by any means made it known to us? then indeed, like the man in the parable, we have found a treasure worth the loss of all that we have, for “what shall a man give in exchange for his soul,” and if we have found out the way of safety for eternal life, we may well rejoice, even though we should be without all earthly good.

The gospel, the good news of Christ’s kingdom, was to the Gentile nations, as the finding of an unexpected treasure. They had been toiling indeed, but not to find the Saviour, for they knew nothing of him. At last their eyes were opened, and they saw him, for the gospel was preached unto them; then, like the man in the parable, they were glad to part with all they had, with all their old idolatries and lying wisdom, so that they might but win Christ, (Acts xix. 17,) and be made part-takers of His kingdom.

Oh let this be our mind. Let us be willing and glad to give up any thing and every thing that would keep us back from Christ our Lord.*

* Is not the eagerness with which men are at this time going every day to dig for gold in the mines of California a lesson to Christians of what should be their eagerness in search of the hidden treasure which, once made our own, is for ever? Men leave their homes, and cross the sea, and bear every hardship to seek for gold, because they believe it is to be found; and the world does not blame them, because the world calls *gold a certain good*. Can it then, in common sense, blame those who are earnest in seeking the salvation of their souls? Surely not unless the truth of Scripture is denied altogether. Yet worldly men do blame this earnestness. What does this show? Surely that their *belief* in the good to be gained from earthly riches is *real*, while their belief in the value of their souls is but words.

At the hour of death, *if they have time to think*, they will judge differently.

Prayer.

O God, my Father, when I am alone in the still hour of night, let thy Holy Spirit rouse up my heart to think over the words of thy blessed Son, and to ask of thee to teach me clearly and simply to understand them. Let me not be content with the vain things of earth. There is a treasure hidden beneath the field of each man's daily life. The idle and the slothful cannot find it, for it does not lie upon the surface. Those who care only for the pleasures of life, will never look for it. Oh, give to me that earnest mind that knows the real worth of the kingdom of heaven. Give me wisdom to weigh as nothing in the balance the splendid beggary of earthly riches which never yet has satisfied a single soul. Give me grace to seek until I find "the true riches, the fulness of him who filleth all in all." Then shall I be happy, fully, entirely happy, for my heart was made for thee, and cannot be content without thee. But holy Lord God, thy treasure is hidden, and sin hath so blinded my sight that, unless thou wilt guide me, I shall not be able to find it. Oh send me a light from heaven to shine upon thy truth, that thy treasure may be mine.

"A ray must come down from above,
That the place where it's hid may be known,
One beam from the Saviour of love
Will discover, and make it my own."

So let it be, my God. Amen.

XLI.

Moreover the Lord Jesus said unto his disciples, when that night they were together with him in the house :—

MATTHEW xiii. 45, 46. "*Again the kingdom of heaven*

is like unto a merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls : Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

The man who found the hidden treasure was not seeking for it. He came upon it by surprise, most likely he was busied in digging his field, even as the shepherds were watching their flocks by night, when the Saviour's birth was made known to them, and, filled with joy and surprise, they left them in the field, and hastened to the place where Jesus was. But it was not in this way the pearl of great price was found by the merchant-man ; he was already seeking for goodly pearls, and when he found it, he was satisfied, and went and sold all that he had, and bought it. Even as when Andrew and John, the two disciples of the Baptist, heard their Master, pointing to Jesus, saying, " Behold the Lamb of God," they immediately left all and followed him, for they had found the good they had been anxiously seeking—the Messiah—the Pearl of great price—that good, without which, the awakened mind can never be satisfied.

The Lord Jesus knew the thoughts of all hearts. He knew there were many who, content in the duties He had given them to do, scarcely thought of a higher good, and yet would rejoice to be shown the true riches He only can give. In the parable of the treasure hidden in the field, He shewed that He did not forget their need of the kingdom of heaven. But He knew also, that there were many who sought after some higher good, and could not be content without it. These are educated minds ; not educated by books only, but by thought and feeling. It is not rank in life that gives this. It is found in the cottage, as well as in the palace ; but it is a noble mind, wherever it is found, and most grievous it is when such a mind is led astray. It is this sense of a higher good which they ought to find, that too often makes ignorant men chartists, and fills educated men

with a restless ambition, seeking in power or in knowledge what never can be found but in God. If He makes known to them that *He only* can satisfy the noble longings of their souls, that in his kingdom already begun on earth, there is that highest good they seek ; and that they may reach it, and make it their own through the knowledge of Jesus Christ the Lord, then they are happy ; for they are seeking goodly pearls, and they have found *the pearl of great price*.

But we are all seeking for pearls. God made us for happiness, and we cannot be content without it. While we are young, our spirits are gay and bright, for we fancy that we shall find it ; and the reason of the many careworn, discontented faces that we see as life goes on, is just this, that people are worn out in the vain search for happiness, and even when not quite miserable at the constant disappointment, they are restless and dissatisfied, for they cannot cheat themselves into being happy. Nothing can make this otherwise ; for, as the flame of fire must rise upwards, or it will fill the house with smoke, and with danger as well as discomfort, so our minds *must* rise up to God from whom they came, or our whole lives will be full of restless discontent. Some of us remember well that, with every thing on earth to make us happy, we never were content a single hour, till in our Bibles we found the pearl of great price, the assurance that Christ our Saviour had died to give us back our lost happiness. Since then we have had many sorrows, God knows how many ; but never again has that uneasy restlessness been upon us ; for we have known that all was over-ruled by Almighty Love, and that the very things that grieved us most would be made to bring about our own happiness, in the good of those we loved best, and in the hastening of Christ's kingdom. Surely such a rest to the soul is a pearl of great price, and well worth all we may have to give up that we may win it.

The merchant-man who was seeking for goodly pearls, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that

he had, and bought it." And if we have indeed found the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and which only can be found in the hope there is in Christ our Lord, then all other things will seem as nothing to us, and even as when the new buds come, the old leaves of themselves fall off, so will old tastes, and hopes, and fears, pass away before the gentle force of true religion.

Oh let us watch that they do not again gain strength, for the things that are seen, the things of the world, have a terrible power over us, and all our care is needed, having found the Pearl, not to lose sight of it again. This is the one, the unbearable grief, for there is no other rest but the rest in Christ.*

HYMN.

In search of enjoyment I wandered in vain,
With a void in my bosom that nothing could fill,
For mirth's gayest smile was succeeded by pain,
And the sweet cup of pleasure proved bitterness still.
The young days of fancy rolled rapidly by.
I shrank with dismay from the future's dark gloom,
When the clay-fettered spirit must mourn till it die,
And man has no rest but the rest of the tomb.

And yet I have revelled in hope's fairy dream,
And tasted the raptures of love's purest bliss,
Delusive are both, though alluring they seem,
Like the vapours that gleam o'er a hidden abyss.
The proud thirst of glory was mine from my birth,
But what can this world to ambition display,
That grasps at the skies, but is bounded by earth,
A spirit of fire in a prison of clay.

But now I have heard of a nobler crown,
A kingdom unfading, a glory divine,
But the humble alone shall inherit that crown,
Then how can that kingdom of glory be mine?

* See this peace and rest set forth in Romans v. 1—11.

Let my strength turn to weakness, my glory to shame,
The reproach of the cross be my earthly reward,
All, all shall be welcome for one blessed name,
The lowly disciple of Jesus the Lord.

Rev. T. Dale.

XLII.

In the different parables we have just read, the Lord Jesus gave the history of His kingdom on earth, beginning by the Parable of the Sower, who went forth to sow the seed which fell on many different soils ; He showed his Gospel would be preached to all ; to those who heeded, and to those who heeded it not.

By the Parable of the Tares, He showed how Satan, the evil one, would always be at work to fill the world with false doctrines, and with lies that would seem to hinder the growth of true religion ; that the true and the false must remain together till the end, when it would be seen which of the two was of the Lord's planting.

By the Parables of the Mustard-seed that became a great tree, and of the Leaven hid in the three measures of meal till the whole was leavened, He showed how, from a very small beginning the religion of His kingdom would spread over the whole earth, and have power to change and stir into active good, every thing with which it had to do.

In the Parables of the Hidden Treasure, and the Pearl of Great Price, He taught this great truth, that man's only real happiness, is Christ's religion ; and that when he has found and received it into his heart *he is satisfied*.

Now, when these were ended, the Lord Jesus spoke to them yet another parable, which was to teach them, that the preaching of the Gospel in all lands, would bring into His kingdom on earth, many who were not His. In the new parable we are about to read, there is a prophecy which has proved to be but

too sadly true; for how plainly it has been seen that many who have the name of Christian are neither Christian in their lives nor in their tempers.

Most of the Apostles of Jesus were fishermen, and in speaking to them He used a figure they could very well understand, because it was a thing they had done as often as they went upon the sea in search of fish, He said :—

MATTHEW xiii. 47—50. “ *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind : which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world : the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*”

In the heading of the chapter in our Bibles, this net that was cast into the sea, is called “a draw-net,” which indeed is the right meaning of the word. It is a net of the largest size, and has leaden weights fastened to it below that it may sweep the bottom of the sea. The upper part is made to float on the top of the water by means of casks, or pieces of wood. When it is carried out in boats, it is dropped into the sea, and shuts in a large part of it. Then the two ends of the net are drawn forward, just in a half circle; then by little and little they are made quite to meet together, so that nothing can escape out of it, when it is drawn up upon the beach, with all that is in it.*

This net the Lord Jesus said was like the kingdom of heaven, which He had come to bring into the world, by the preaching of the Gospel. Like the draw-net, it would gather into it of every kind, for as every Christian country has in it bad as well as good, so in the outward Church of Christ there must be of

* The same sort of net is now used on the coast of Cornwall, and is sometimes half a mile in length. See Trench, p. 135.

every kind. And this must still be so till the end of the world, when, at the appointed time, "the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Awful words—and the more alarming that they are repeated again exactly as the Saviour spoke them after the Parable of the Tares.

Surely, surely, it concerns us much to search into our hearts, and to examine well our lives, lest we may be found to have been brought into the Christian Church, and yet to have no part in Christ. This is the time of trial, this is the time for turning to God with heart and soul. Let each of us take heed now, lest in the end he should be found *a cast-away*.

When the Lord Jesus had ended this parable, He asked his disciples whether this meaning was quite plain to them.

Verses 51, 52. "*Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord. Then said He unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.*"

The scribes were at that time the teachers of the people, therefore Jesus speaks here to his Apostles as teachers, and tells them that they, and all who like them should be appointed to teach, if they really understood the truths of God's kingdom, should each of them have in his mind a treasure from the stores of which He might give to others as they needed.

This comparison of a householder who keeps in his store-room things new and old for the use of his family, and brings out of it whatever he may find is wanted, is a lively picture of a teacher of religion, who in the stores of his mind and memory has the truths of the Old Testament and of the New, laid up,

ready for use, and brings out the Law or the Gospel, as the case of each may need.

Indeed, if we store our minds with Bible truths, as we have been taught them, we shall find them there, ready for use whenever we may want them. The believer, laid upon the bed of sickness, has in his memory a store-room of God's promises, and if he lifts up his heart in humble, earnest prayer for the Holy Spirit's helps, he will be able, in the things, new and old, which he was taught in the days of health, to find all he needs. Many have passed through the dark valley of the shadow of death fearing no evil, and have told their friends that all they had learned when they were children had then come back into their minds, and given them strength and comfort. All the words of the Saviour repeat to us one solemn lesson. *Now* is the time ; haste to use it ; soon it will be gone. When the angels come forth to separate the true children of God from those who only seemed to be his—then it will be too late. Nothing then will remain but the weeping and wailing of a lost soul.

Prayer.

O God my Saviour, I thank and bless thee for the store-house of heavenly truths thou hast given us in thy holy Bible. Grant to each of us wisdom to use it well, to lay up in our hearts a store of things new and old, so that they may at all times be ready for our use. So shall we find guidance through every difficulty, comfort in every sorrow, strength in all our weakness, and in the hour of death peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

XLIII.

MARK iv. 35, 36. " *And the same day, when the even*

was come, He saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as He was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships."

St. Mark, after giving the Parable of the Sower who went forth to sow his seed, and of the Grain of Mustard-seed, with our Lord's explanation of them to his disciples, says expressly, that *it was "the same day, when even was come, that He saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side."* We must therefore suppose that it was, while the crowds who had been on the sea-shore, were breaking up, and "going away, that the Lord Jesus" went into the house "where his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the trees of the field," (Matt. xiii. 36) and that after the people were all gone to their homes, and the shores of the lake were again quiet, He saith unto those who were with him, "Let us pass over unto the other side."

It had been on this day that his mother and his brethren had come to seek for him, (Mark iii. 31.) no doubt to see if they could not persuade him to leave, for a time at least, the work that was more than enough to wear out his strength. When we remember this, and that his kinsmen had actually tried to lay hold of him, "for they said He is beside himself," (Mark iii. 21.) we may perhaps find the reason why our Lord, late in the evening of so wearying a day, chose to pass over to the other side of the sea of Galilee. By doing so He withdrew himself quite from his family, and his mother's fears for him would have time, before she saw him again, to be turned into joyful hope, and stedfast faith, when she heard from every one, the wonderful words He had spoken of the sure growth of his kingdom on earth. It is written, "they took him even as He was, in the ship," all wearied and worn by a long day of fatigue. *How weary!* We see from this, that He had scarcely

entered the boat, before He fell asleep on a pillow, which most likely the loving care of his disciples had brought for him. "And there were also with him other little ships," for there were many besides his apostles who followed him night and day.

When we look back to what we have read of this beautiful lake,* we shall easily be able to picture to ourselves the little fleet of fishers' boats setting sail in the quiet evening, which indeed must have been almost night. We may see in thought the little ships leaving the calm shore, so quiet now, that all the busy crowds have gone home to sleep. Night in the land of the East is so lovely that it must have been beautiful to have seen them spreading out their sails, as they put out to sea and gained the middle of the lake, where the river Jordan flows rapidly through it.

MARK iv. 37—39. "*And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? AND HE AROSE, AND REBUKED THE WIND, AND SAID UNTO THE SEA, PEACE, BE STILL. AND THE WIND CEASED, AND THERE WAS A GREAT CALM.*"

Oh! is there need of a single word to prove that Jesus was the Son of God? The tempest heard, and obeyed. The winds and the sea knew their Maker's voice, (Hebrews i. 2.) and they were still.

Verses 40, 41. "*And He said unto them, (to his disciples) Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?*"

Yes, in these few verses we see *what manner of man* the

* No. XVI. Vol. ii. pp. 77, 78.

Saviour was. True man, for He was wearied, and He slept, overpowered by the labours of the day—the moment his mind was called back from teaching the people, and his body was at rest,—He slept.

True God, for when the storm came down upon the lake, “He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.”

Prayer.

O God, my Saviour, through all the storms of life, let thy voice be heard. When angry passions rage, rebuke them, Lord. Let not my faith fail me. Thou carest for me. Thou wouldst not that I should perish. Say to my troubled heart, “Peace, be still,” and let there be a calm. Grant this, my God, through Jesus Christ thy Son. Amen.

XLIV.

MARK V. LUKE VIII.

MARK V. 1. “*And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.*”

The little fleet reached the shore, and the Saviour landed.

Was that broken sleep on board the fishers’ boat the only rest of that night, which divided one long day of toil from another?

It seems that it was, for it is written :—

MARK V. 2—5. “*And when He was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,* who had his dwelling among the*

* St. Matthew, in chap. viii. 28, tells of *two* possessed of devils who thus met our Lord immediately upon his landing. From St. Mark and St. Luke, mentioning but one in their fuller account of all that happened, it is likely that

tombs ; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains : Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces : neither could any man tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones."

What a piteous, miserable history of a man possessed by the Evil One ! How darkly and how terribly does it show what the mind of Satan is ! What he *would* do to man at all times *if he could*.

When we first read of our Lord's casting out an unclean spirit from a man that was possessed, in the synagogue of Capernaum,* I told you all that is now known of this awful power which Satan then had of entering into the bodies of those men who had yielded to his temptations, and of forcing them to do and speak as he desired. Light and darkness seem by turns to have flickered through them—agony of mind and desire of deliverance—a fearful sense that they had by some means themselves given Satan this horrid power over them—the rage and despair of this miserable state, and the fearful storm raised by the evil spirit within. What a picture of hell upon earth !

Who can wonder that the wretched man, possessed with the devil, wandered day and night, crying and cutting himself with stones among the mountains and the tombs that cover the hills of Gadara.†

Verses 6—8. "*But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran*

one of the two was not in so dreadful a state as the other. Perhaps indeed it was the grievous companionship of the other, and living with him in the tombs, that made him also "exceeding fierce." However this may be, St. Matthew tells that both were healed.

* No. VI. Vol. II. p. 24—26. -

† The hills on which the city of Gadara stood are full of caverns which were used as tombs. The traveller Buckingham gives a curious account of them.

and worshipped him, and cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not. For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit."

"The devils believe and tremble;" and the evil spirit that possessed this wretched man had no choice but to fall at the feet of Jesus, and to worship him. We cannot know whether it was the hope of being set free that made the man run to the Saviour the moment He appeared, or whether the evil spirit within him was forced to do so by a power stronger than his own; * but when he had fallen at the feet of Jesus, the voice that had in a moment stilled the tempest on the sea was raised to calm a fury wilder than the raging of the storm. "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit," was the command; "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most High God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not," was the answer of the evil spirit;—and there is something very terrible in its hopeless fear, knowing so well the doom deserved.

Not to the evil spirit but to the man the Lord Jesus spoke, and asked a question likely to calm his thoughts and lead him back to the remembrance of what he had been, before he fell into this dreadful state :—

MARK V. 9. "*And he asked him, What is thy name? and he answered, My name is Legion : for we are many."*

What a fearful answer! He could not remember what he had been. He felt so many evil spirits had power over him, that he could give himself no name but Legion—why did he call himself so? A legion is a band of Roman soldiers, and no word among the Jews could so well have explained to them the poor wretch's sense of a great number of enemies, all acting

* Luke xi. 21, 22. Page 132, 133, Vol. II,

together as one to tyrannize over and oppress him. They were used to see the Roman legion—six thousand soldiers all march together as one man, to punish and to destroy all who resisted the will of Rome. The unhappy man could not think of his own name, but answered as bound up in the legion of evil spirits that ruled him in the name and power of Satan. But the stronger than Satan was come, and he knew that this was the hour when he should be driven forth. Still he made the wretched man speak.

MARK v. 10—13. “*And he besought him (Jesus) much that he would not send them away out of the country. Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.*”

Does it seem strange that the Lord Jesus should have granted leave to the evil spirits to enter into the swine? His reasons must have been wise and good, and though we are not always able to understand his doings, yet, if we think, we often may see in some part his wisdom and his kindness. The man from whom the devils were cast out, had, in a moment, a proof given him, that they were really gone from him. The violence done upon the swine shewed him that he was in truth delivered—The fury of the legion of devils had passed from him to them. If they belonged to Jews, it was unlawful to keep them, for the filthy swine were marked out, by the law of God given by Moses, as the type of sinners who delighted themselves in their sins; and therefore the Jews were forbidden to eat of their flesh, or even to touch them, for they were unclean. The loss of this herd of swine would therefore be a rightful punishment,

and one which might well teach the Jews the sin of following the customs of the Gentiles, who dwelt among them.* But, whoever were their owners, the loss of the swine immediately showed what manner of people they were. It is written—

MARK v. 14, 15. *“They that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, (at the feet of Jesus, Luke viii. 35.) clothed, and in his right mind : and they were afraid.”*

LUKE viii. 36, 37. *“They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed. Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them ; for they were taken with great fear : and He went up into the ship, and returned back again.”*

It was nothing to these worldly-minded people that a man, most likely one of their fellow-citizens, was set free from Satan's cruel bondage, and that they saw him, no longer naked, bleeding, and howling aloud in the anguish of his mind, but clothed and sitting at the feet of Jesus, in his right mind. They cared not for this, they only cared for the loss of the swine. They were afraid, for they did not know what might next be done. If their thoughts had not been so full of the love of gain, they would have seen the blessings the Saviour brought ; but they cared not for the kingdom of heaven ; their care was all for the things of this world. They had no desire to be delivered from their sins, so “they besought him to depart from them, for they were taken with great fear.” And their prayer was heard : Jesus did depart ; *He let them alone.* “They loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” †

* So many Greeks lived in Gadara, that Josephus calls it a Greek city, and he says that multitudes of the Jews followed many of their customs.

† The same temper of mind is often shewn among ourselves. Where people

LUKE viii. 38. "*Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him (Jesus), that He might be with him.*"

From the words of St. Matthew, it seems that He even followed him into the ship, with the prayer that he might go with him, for it is written :—

MARK v. 18—20. "*And when He was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.*" "*And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis (throughout the whole region, Luke v. 39.) how great things Jesus had done for him : and all men did marvel.*"

The people of the country were anxious to hurry our Lord from their shores, but the poor man whom He had just saved from the power of the devil, could not bear to be parted from him. He entreated to be allowed to go with him, that he might be with him. Was it that he feared the evil spirits might again enter into him ? or was it that his grateful love

have for a long time lived in careless sin, they do not like to be roused up from it. It is often seen that a whole neighbourhood is disturbed by a faithful minister of Christ coming among them, and that they would be very glad to be rid of him again ; like the Gadarenes, who were so grieved for the loss of the herd of swine, and so afraid for what also they might have to lose, that they paid no attention to the wonderful cure which Jesus had wrought by driving out the evil spirits, and were glad to be rid of him out of their country. Many people, like them, are so angry and alarmed at being told they must give up their sinful habits of life, that they take no heed to the blessing the gospel gives, in setting them free from the power of the Evil One. The greatest misfortune that can befall a people is, that when they turn themselves away from the light of religion, God should, as it were, take them at their word ; and, turning from them, as Christ did from the Gadarenes, should "let them alone."

for his Saviour made him wish to follow him for evermore? It was true that he was only safe in Christ from Satan's power, but he would find, even when at a distance, that He was still mighty to save, and his love and gratitude were to be shown, not in following him, but in doing his work. "Go home," said the Lord Jesus, "go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." This man had been known through all that country for the fearful state of raging madness into which Satan had thrown him. Night and day his cries had been heard in the mountains and in the tombs. He was so exceeding fierce that no man might pass by that way. His friends had often tried in vain to bind him with fetters and with chains; his furious strength had been so great that he had plucked the chains asunder, and broken the fetters in pieces, "neither could any man tame him." What a witness then would he be of the power and mercy of the Lord Jesus! In his own home all might see him, all might hear from him the great things Jesus had done for him. While he lived he would be a constant sign to them of the great truth, that Christ was come "to destroy the works of the devil." Therefore in his loving-kindness, the Saviour desired him to return to his own friends. They were not yet ready to welcome him as the Messiah, and He left them at their own desire; but not without a witness that He was able and willing to heal them of all the diseases of their souls. The man obeyed, "and he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things the Lord had done for him; and all men did marvel."

There is a lesson we may learn from the last part of the history of this man. It is this. When by the power of Christ and his Gospel, men have been delivered from the bondage of sin and Satan, it is *at home* they should strive to show their love and gratitude to Him who has saved them. It is among *their own friends* they should show the reality of the change

that has been wrought in them. Only a few are called upon to preach the Gospel by entering the ministry, but all, whether they be men or women, are called upon to show their friends how great things the Lord hath done for them, and is willing to do for all. In this way, and by the great power of example, they who see how peaceful and happy is the service of God, which has taken the place of the wild and miserable yoke of the devil, will be brought themselves to wish to hear the words of Christ the Lord, and to be saved by him.

Prayer.

O holy Jesus—mighty to save—still we need thy power to defend us from the Evil One.

Legions of devils still seem to enter into unhappy men, and drive them to break all the ties of decency and of affection. O come, in thine Almighty power and love, and bind the strong man of sin, that he may no more rage so furiously, and grant to each unhappy sinner, that, brought by thee to a right mind, clothed in thy righteousness, he may sit at thy feet to hear thy word, and arise from thence to show his friends at home what great things the Lord hath done for him. Amen.

XLV.

MATTHEW IX. MARK V. LUKE VIII.

The Lord Jesus had no sooner reached the other side of the lake than crowds came to meet him. It is written :—

MARK V. 21, 22. “*And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him : and He was nigh unto the sea. And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name.*” A father in deep distress.

LUKE viii. 42. "*For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying.*"

MARK v. 22, 23. "*And when he saw him, he fell at his feet, and besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death : I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her that she may be healed ; and she shall live.*"

Yes, he had left her at the point of death, and he believed that before he could have reached Jesus, the last struggle must be over, for St. Matthew tells us, that in the agony of his mind, he said, " my daughter is even now dead."

At once the kind and pitying Saviour " arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples."

Let us try to think we see him as He went from the sea-shore, the people thronging round him.

In that crowd there was one—a secret sufferer—who was ashamed to come openly for help, for she was weakened by long disease, and cast down by constant disappointment :—

MARK v. 25, 26, "*A certain woman, who had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians,* and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.*"

Alas, how many who read these lines, know by their own case, how to pity her !

Verses 27—29. "*When she had heard of Jesus, she came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may but touch his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up ; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.*"

She touched his garment,—only one touch, and she was

* This means that many doctors had tried to cure her in many ways, but had not been able.

cured! The Saviour is the well-spring of life. From him a stream is ever flowing for all who feel their need.

Verses 30, 31. *"And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?"*

Jesus well knew who was the sufferer, and what was her need, but He wished to bestow upon her a greater good than the cure of her disease. He would give her the comfort of hearing from His own lips that her modest faith was known to him, and He would strengthen it, and take away her fears by speaking with her, face to face, and bidding her go in peace of mind, and in health of body.

Verses 32—34. *"And He looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And He said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague."*

The poor father—what must he have felt when Jesus stopped upon his way? He had left his child at the point of death, and while the woman spoke, his daughter's spirit might be gone for ever; yet his faith was great, he said not a word, and the cure he saw, and the words of kindness which he heard might well fill him with hope. All his strength was needed, for even while this was going on,

Verse 35. *"While He yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's house certain (messengers) which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further?"*

Immediately, before he had time to despair, "Jesus, as soon as he heard the word that was spoken," said unto him, "Be not afraid, only believe," "and she shall be made whole." (Luke.)

Verse 38. "*And He cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly.*" "*And the minstrels* and the people making a noise.*"

For the Jews lamented their dead with doleful music and mournful cries, beating their breasts and rending their garments. "He said unto them, Give place," "and when He was come in, He saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead."

LUKE viii. 51, 52. "*And when He came into the house He suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden. And all wept, and bewailed her: but He said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth.*"

They could not believe him, for they saw her dead. "But when He had put them all out, He taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in" to the chamber where she lay. O what a sight was there. The only daughter—she who had been as a sunbeam in the house—lay dead.

LUKE viii. 54, 55. "*And Jesus took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway.*"

Yes, the dead arose—the "little daughter" was given back to her father's arms. The mother once more clasped her child.

* They who make music.

Their amazement was so great, that perhaps at first they scarcely knew the greatness of that sudden joy, for it is written, "they were astonished with a great astonishment." She arose from the bed of death, "and walked." The spirit had come again, but Jesus knew how weak the body must be, "and He commanded that something should be given her to eat."

Tears, such as these parents had shed, have been flowing on from that time to this. Many a one since then has known their grief, but oh, not one has heard the voice which broke through the stillness of death, and said, "Maid, arise." Yet it is only delayed.

In every home where all weep and bewail the daughter who was their pride and their joy, the Saviour still entereth in, and even in the chamber of death, He saith to the father and the mother, "Be not afraid, only believe." Not yet will He call her spirit back. They must wait awhile; but on her tomb Christ has written, "She is not dead, but sleepeth."

Prayer.

O blessed Jesus, when our homes are filled with mourning, visit us in thy pitying love. Say to our sinking hearts, "They for whom you grieve are not dead—they only sleep." Thou knowest our weakness. We cannot see thee; we hear not thy voice, but we feel and know, because we see, the awful change that death doth make, and unless thou art near, our faith must fail. Do thou enter with us into the chamber of death, and in that solemn hour, say unto us, "Be not afraid, only believe;" and give us, O our Saviour, give us power to believe, that we may calmly trust thy word for evermore. Amen.

XLVI.

MATTHEW IX. 18. MARK V. 22.

• When Jesus had raised the daughter of Jairus from the bed of death, He commanded her parents “to tell no man what was done.” Crowds had gone with him to the house, and had found there “the minstrels and the people making a noise,” and those who wept and wailed greatly. Before the eyes of all He had entered in with three of his disciples, and had sent out of the house many who laughed him to scorn, because they knew that she was dead, while yet He said to them, “Give place, the maid is not dead but sleepeth.” We may judge what must have been the feelings of the crowds outside when the mournful music, which had for a moment been hushed by the words of Jesus, was changed to a burst of joy. The maiden had arisen ! Her parents, only, knew what had been done, for with the three disciples, Peter and James and John, they only had been suffered to enter the chamber where she lay. They only had heard the voice that called the spirit back ; they only had seen the Saviour take their dead child by the hand as He bade her “rise,” and they were commanded to be silent ; but all knew that the daughter of Jairus was alive again,—

MATTHEW ix. 26—33. “ *And the fame thereof went abroad into all that land. And when Jesus departed thence, (from the house of Jairus) two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us. And when He was come into the house, the blind men came to him : (He had tried their faith by allowing them to follow without taking any heed of them, or even seeming to hear them, but now,) He saith unto them, Believe ye*

that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched He their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straightly charged them, saying, See that no man know it. But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country. As they went out, behold, they (not the blind men, but other people) brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel."

No, never before; but now the promised seed of the woman was come, and Satan's power gave way before him: but still the Pharisees whispered their wicked whisper among the people, "He casteth out devils through the Prince of the devils." We have read the Saviour's answer to this before.* We have seen how he shewed them the impossibility, as well as the guilt and danger, of what they said. Now their words must be past over in silence, as a false and sinful slander which it is needless to answer again.

MARK VI. 1—3. "*And Jesus went out from thence, and came into his own country; (to Nazareth) and his disciples follow him. And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him."*

We cannot be sure whether these were really the brothers and sisters of Jesus, or his first cousins, because among the

* Nos. XXV. and XXVI. Vol. II.

Jews the children of brothers and sisters were called brethren, but it seems that those who, having been neighbours, should have been friends, were jealous that Jesus should have been lifted so far above themselves. They were offended at his fame, and spoke of him as the Carpenter, because no doubt He had helped Joseph, his supposed father, in his trade. That He did this, remains as a blessing to all who earn their bread by the labours of their hands, for must it not lighten their toil to think that Jesus their Redeemer, did the same ?

MATTHEW xiii. 57. *"And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house."*

This is so true that it has become a saying among ourselves, for it is every day seen that the lessons of religion given by the wise and the good, are the least cared for by the worldly friends who know them best, and for that very reason despise them, as being no better than themselves, indeed very often in worldly things much less esteemed than they are. What a comfort it must be to all those whose friends and neighbours are offended at them because of their religion ; to feel that their Lord and Master Christ knows their grief and vexation ; for though strangers from all parts followed in crowds to hear him, when He returned to his own home, his neighbours would not listen, and were offended at him. But this sinful temper of theirs brought a great evil upon them.

MATTHEW xiii. 58. *"He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief."*

St. Mark writes, that—

MARK vi. 5. *"He could there do no mighty work, save that He laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them."*

The Saviour never *forced* himself upon any ; all who came to him, He received ; and He sought out many sufferers, but, even as He left the Gadarenes at their own request, so in Nazareth, except in a few sick chambers where He was welcomed, He made no use of his Almighty power. Let all lay this to heart. Jesus did not remain long in Nazareth. While He was there, the want of faith of the people made even his love useless to them—and, even while men in careless pride refuse to believe that the Saviour is now calling upon them, their day of grace is passing away from them.

XLVII.

MATT. IX. X.

The men of Nazareth had refused to listen, therefore our Saviour would not stay long among them. He set out upon one of those journies which He made from time to time. “ He went round about the villages teaching.” And wherever He went, a crowd followed him. These were so eager to hear, and to be near him, for every day He seemed more and more certainly to fulfil all that the prophets had foretold of the promised Messiah, that they left their homes and followed him wherever He went. They did not think of the fatigue, till weariness obliged them to lay down to rest wherever they could.

MATTHEW ix. 36. “ *But (Jesus) when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, (they were tired and lay down,*) and were scattered abroad (that is from their homes) as sheep having no shepherd.*”

He looked upon them as they lay around in the open fields,

* See margin of the Bible.

earnest and eager to be taught. They were like ripe corn that only needed to be reaped.

Verses 37, 38. *"Then saith He unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few : pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into his harvest."*

And now the Lord determined to send his Apostles through all the land of Israel to preach his gospel.

MARK vi. 7. and MATTHEW x. 1. *(And He called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two,) and "He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease."*

He did not send them forth without telling them where they were to go. It was to the Jews, God's own people, that the Messiah had been expressly promised to be their Spiritual King, of the line of David, "whose kingdom should know no end ;" and to the Jews therefore the good news, that the Messiah was indeed come, must first be told. Therefore when Jesus sent forth the twelve,

Verses 5—7. *(He) "commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not : (to no strangers) but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick ; cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils : freely ye have received, freely give."*

He gave them powers as great as his own, their love must also be as great.

He also said unto them :—

Verses 9, 10. *"Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor*

brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves : for the workman is worthy of his hire."

All who gladly heard their teaching, and believed the good news they brought of the kingdom of heaven, would gladly give them all that was needful for their daily wants ; and they were to trust to this. They were to take care not to bring disgrace upon the name of Christ by living with people of bad character, therefore He said unto them :—

Verse 11. "*And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy ; and there abide till ye go thence.*"

By staying in the first house where they were received with kindness, they would prevent men from saying that they were visiting about for their own pleasure. He also said :—

Verses 12. 13. "*And when ye come into an house, salute it (give the family your blessing) And if the house (or family) be worthy, let your peace come upon it : but if it be not worthy, let your peace return unto you.*"

In old times it was usual on first going into a house, to salute it, by saying, "Peace be upon this house." And the message brought by each of the twelve Apostles, was *peace indeed*, for it was the good news of the pardon of all sin, sent by Christ the Lord to all who were willing to be his people. If the family, or any in the house, believed this message, and made welcome the Apostles who brought it, then the peace of God would come into their hearts, and rest upon them, but if, on the contrary, they would have none of it, then peace of mind would never more be theirs, it would remain with the Apostles, and with all who would listen to them.

Verse 14. "*And (said Christ the Lord) whosoever*

shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet."

All the Jews knew very well what that sign meant, for when any one of them returned from a journey into a heathen land, as soon as they again set their feet upon the ground of their own country, they shook the dust of the other land, from off them, to show that they had nothing more to do with it.

The Lord Jesus adds a terrible warning of what the end will be of those people who refuse the religion of Christ : —

Verse 15. *" Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhæ in the day of judgment, than for that city."*

Awful words were these to the Jews who saw, in their own land, the Dead Sea roll its black and bitter waters over the place where Sodom and Gomorrhæ once stood,* and awful words are these to us who know the terrible punishment that fell, even in this life, upon the people of Israel, who refused the religion of Christ. All who hear, but will not heed, the message of the Gospel of pardon through Christ, will do wisely to think of that terrible judgment-day, when "small and great shall stand before God" to be judged, "every man according to his works," and when "whosoever" is "not found written in the book of life," shall be "cast into the lake of fire."

Our Lord then warned the apostles what they were to expect from their fellow-men, and how needful it was that they should be careful to give no offence that they could possibly help.

MATTHEW X. 16. *" Behold, (said He) I send you forth*

* A sea, called the Dead Sea, because no fish can live in its waters, nor plant upon its shores, fills up the valley where stood the cities of Sodom and Gomorrhæ and the other cities of the plain, till they were destroyed for their wickedness by fire from heaven. Gen. XIX.

as sheep in the midst of wolves : be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

The wisdom of the serpent lies in this—that he will always avoid a battle if he can, gliding away without noise into any safe place, and the disciples of Christ were never to seek for quarrels, but on the contrary, to be peaceful and quiet as the innocent dove.

MATTHEW x. 17, 18. "*But beware of men, (said our Lord to them) : for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues ; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony (or witness) against them and the Gentiles."*

As time went on, it would be found, that not the Jews only, but other nations would join together, to persecute and ill use the followers of Christ. But the words of the Gospel, which they should hear from them, would be as a witness against them, that the offer of mercy through the Redeemer had been made to them, and that they had refused it. The apostles would be taught what to say ; they had no need to think before hand how they should defend themselves. Our Lord said to them :—

MATTHEW x. 19, 20. "*But when they (shall) deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak ; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you."*

The message of the Gospel with which they were sent, was not their own, and they might trust to their Lord who sent them with that message from the Father Almighty, that He would also put words of defence into their minds when it was needed ; therefore they might have peace in the midst of danger. God always stands by those who are faithful in His cause.

Prayer.

We bless thee, O our Saviour, that thou didst send forth thine apostles with thy message of love. From them a voice still goes forth into every land, for they have left thy written word, and it is a light to guide us through the gloom of life and death. By the light of thy Gospel we may see thy Fatherly hand overruling every thing that befalls us. By the light of thy Gospel we may see that, to the Christian, death is only the gate of life; and that beyond it, thou, O Christ our Saviour, dost wait to receive him to thyself.

Fill our hearts with adoring gratitude for this thy precious gift. May we prize it as our best treasure; and may we love, and receive with joy all the ministers of thy Gospel, esteeming them highly for their Master's sake. Amen.

XLVIII.

MATTHEW X. LUKE XII.

Our Lord still spoke to the twelve, but his words now seem given to warn, to guide, and to comfort, not the apostles only, but all who should preach the Gospel till the end of the world. He tells what was to happen wherever Christianity should spread; and the fierce anger it would always raise in the minds of those who, refusing the Gospel, chose for themselves the service of this world. The sending forth the twelve apostles "to preach the kingdom of God," was the beginning of a new order of things. The religion of Christ which they carried with them was to be the leaven that would leaven the world; and wherever it came it would raise a ferment at first. It would spread every where, and in spite of every thing. It would be seen that its power was stronger than all human ties,

for it would enter into families and shew that the love of God was stronger than the love of man. It would show too that the fierce hatred of Christ's religion would be so great as to destroy all natural affection; for the time was at hand when men would persecute to the death those who had been their nearest and their dearest, but who, from the moment they became Christian, they hated with a bitter hatred. The words of our Lord are these:—

MATTHEW x. 21. "*And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.*"

When Christianity began to spread among the nations, it soon was seen how fearfully true those words were. We may read in the history of the times, how men gave up to torture and to death those they had loved the dearest, because they would not, even to save their lives, deny their Lord. Jew and Gentile, though they were enemies in all else, joined together to persecute the Christians. It is so to this hour. Blessed be God, we dwell in a Christian land, and though the ungodly will always hate and despise the true Christian, yet they dare not *persecute* as in these old times. With us, unkindness and scorn are the worst a Christian can now receive of evil at the hands even of unbelievers; but in the heathen lands, which still have not the name of Christ, the same bitter hate still shows itself against His religion, and still, all who are brought truly to believe in him, are given up to the cruel rage of those who think nothing but death should be the reward of those who become Christian. Why is this? The answer is plain. Those of all countries, and of all times, whose whole hopes and strivings are for the things of this world, must hate and seek to destroy a religion which teaches that their wisdom is but folly, and their labour but loss. Christianity, *true, real*

Christianity, must be the death of worldliness, therefore the worldling must always hate the religion of Christ. Besides, there must be enmity and strife between the seed of the serpent, or those who love sin and therefore serve Satan, and the seed of the woman (Christ) which are they who, loving him, seek to serve him truly.

Jesus knew all this, and, instead of hiding the truth from his disciples, He told them plainly what they ought to expect. He said :—

MATTHEW X. 22. “ *Ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake ; but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.*”

This would be their comfort, that, whatever was the manner of the end of the Christian’s life, if he were faithful to death, he should be saved. And oh how little would the spirit, in the glory and joys of heaven, think of the short pains that had set him free from his mortal body !

But the disciples of Christ were not to seek for death. On the contrary, they had a work to do, and they must use all lawful means to preserve their lives that they might do it. Jesus said :—

MATTHEW X. 23. “ *But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another : for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.*”

Some think that the meaning of these last words is, that before the gospel of Christ should have been preached in all the cities of Israel, destruction should fall upon Jerusalem, and upon the nation ; for this is sometimes called, the coming of Christ to take vengeance on his enemies. Others think that our Lord’s words meant to tell, that his gospel should not be every where preached, through all the world, till He, the Son of man, came again, in person, to take to himself the kingdom.

To the Apostles, and to all who after them should carry the message of the gospel among all people, the Lord Jesus spoke, when He showed them, that however cruelly they might be used, they would but share in the portion of their Lord. This was comfort, for if they shared his sufferings, they would also share his glory. He said unto them :—

Verses 24—26. “ *The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household ? (Verse 26.) Fear them not therefore : for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed ; and hid, that shall not be known.*’

The day was coming when the secrets of all hearts should be known, when all should be made plain. Then it would be seen that, though men might have reviled the followers of Christ, and might even have given the name of sin as well as folly to their religion, they only were the truly wise, they only should be safe ; when ruin would fall upon those who had opposed them.

Nothing belonging to that religion, which was to show men how they might be saved, was to be kept back from them.

Verse 27. “ *What I tell you in darkness, (said Jesus) that speak ye in light : and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.*”

Christ chiefly taught the people in dark sayings or parables, which in private He more fully explained to his disciples, but they were not to do so. They were openly, loudly, and in all places, to declare the truths and doctrines He had taught them.

If we compare with the parables the plain speaking of the Epistles at the end of the New Testament, which were written after the death and rising again of the Lord Jesus, we shall see how truly, and how well, this command of his was obeyed. In

all these epistles there is not one parable or dark saying, and they were indeed so publicly given, that they might be said to have been, as it were, preached upon the housetops.

Prayer.

O holy and merciful God, I adore thee that thou hast cast my lot in a land where none dare persecute to the death, those who follow thee. Let not this safety for the body cause me to be careless for my soul; for still the world is full of danger to the Christian's faith. Lukewarmness of spirit is as death. O rouse me up to a constant watchfulness, that by thy grace I may "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith I am called."

Give me wisdom to see danger wherever it is, give me strength to resist the sin that is within me, and around me, that I may not be conformed to the spirit of this world, but may discern good and evil, not by the rules of worldly men, but by the guidance of thy holy Word, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

XLIX.

LUKE XII. 1—9.

You have heard before that it is not possible to know for certain, the exact times in which our Lord spoke and did the things of which we read; but it seems likely to have been at this time that He repeated to many, nearly the same words He had spoken to the twelve Apostles, before He sent them forth to preach the Gospel.

It was not the Apostles only who should soon be called upon to suffer for his sake. Jesus in looking upon the crowd, at a time—

LUKE xii. 1, 2. "*When there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, (that is, so many that*

they could not be counted) *insomuch that they trode one upon another, He began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed ; neither hid, that shall not be known.*"

He knew well which of the crowd were his disciples, that is, He knew who among the people followed him because they wished to be taught by him ; and speaking to them, He bid them "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." This time He used the figure of leaven to express that which was bad. Do you remember the parable of a handful of leaven that changed the nature of much flour, and that Jesus said it was like the kingdom of heaven, or his true religion, which changes human nature, wherever its power is really felt ? Do you remember also that when we read that parable you were told that the figure of leaven was often used in the Bible in quite a different sense, to show how any remains of sin, wilfully kept in the heart, would spoil our religion ?

It was in this last sense that our Lord now used it, when He bade the people "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." The Pharisees looked upon themselves as very religious, but what should have been religion was nothing but desire for the praise of man. This had changed its nature, and made it nothing but an outside show ; and our Lord, looking upon a crowd in which He knew there were many who truly desired to be taught the holy truths of God, bade them to beware of this pride of heart, and to remember that though outside religion might seem real to man, there was a day coming, when the true and the false should both be brought to the brightness of a light, that would surely put an end to all pretence.

"For" said He, "there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed (brought to light) ; neither hid, that shall not be

known." The time was coming when they MUST speak out their evil thoughts, and Jesus said unto them :—

LUKE xii. 3. "*Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light ; and that which ye have spoken in the ear, in closets, shall be proclaimed upon the house-tops.*"

The Lord Jesus knew that his people must soon be so sorely tried by the evils brought upon them for the sake of their religion, that nothing would be able to keep up their courage but the thought of the judgment-day, when it would certainly be seen who was right, and who was wrong. He knew all that was before them ; nor would He hide from them the dangers that were sure to come upon them ; but there was one thought which had before given men courage to choose death in the service of God, rather than life gained by sin,* (Dan. iii. vi. 10.) and this thought would also give *them* strength in the time of need ; He reminded them of it in these words :—

LUKE xii. 4, 5. "*And I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that can kill the body. and after that, have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear : Fear Him which, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell ; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him.*"

Yet this very fear was full of comfort, for the God of all power and might cared for the least of his creatures ; how much more then must He care for those who were his children. Jesus shewed them this in a few words. He said :—

LUKE xii. 6, 7. "*Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings ? and not one of them is forgotten before God. But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore : ye are of more value than many sparrows.*"

Yes, He whom they saw not was always near. He would care for them, and even if they lost their lives for his sake, the greater would be their gain. Jesus assured them of this :—

LUKE xii. 8, 9. *“ Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God : But he that denieth me before men, shall be denied before the angels of God.”*

And this is true now, as it was true then. We are, few of us, in any danger of our lives, for the sake of our religion, but there are many things we fear besides death. When tempted to be in any way ashamed of the religion of Christ, let us strengthen ourselves against that mean and cowardly shame by the thought of the time, when to have boldly confessed Christ for our Lord, will be a glory in which the very angels shall rejoice.

Prayer.

O God, let holy love and fear so fill my heart, that there may be no room for a double mind, and for the base fear of man. Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief, for though I know assuredly that the time is fast coming when to have confessed thee in thought and word and deed will be our only safety, and that even now thou dost watch over thy children, to bless them, and to keep them, yet my weakness is so great, that I am afraid, where there is no cause for fear. Give me holy boldness, that I may look up to thee in every straight, and that I may fear nothing but sin against thee my God and Saviour. Amen.

L.

While Jesus spoke to the people—

LUKE xii. 13. “ *One of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.*”

This man clearly looked upon Jesus as one who had a right to command them. His brother, perhaps, was in the crowd, and that was too good an opportunity to be lost, for no doubt he thought that he would not dare to refuse to obey one who could do such mighty works as Jesus had done.

The answer of Jesus at once showed him, and all around them, that He took to himself no charge of worldly matters, except as they hindered the growth of the Divine life within the soul.

Verse 14. “ *And He said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you ?*”

But though Jesus did not look upon worldly things as under his charge; He watched over the worldly spirit which too often makes these things the ruin of the soul. Therefore

Verse 15. “ *He said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness ; for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*”

He then explained to them the meaning of these words, and showed them *how* a man’s LIFE was in no way depending upon his riches ; and how he might have very great riches, and yet be in no way the better for it. He did this, by giving them a parable or story which had in it the meaning He wished to make them understand. It was this :—

Verses 16—21. *"The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

This parable was a warning to the two brothers who had been disputing about the money or land left by their father. It showed the one who had it, that he must take heed how he used it. It showed the other how little it was really worth his care. It was a warning to them,—to all the people who stood around, and to every one of ourselves who read it. Let us think it well over, that we may clearly see all that it teaches.

This rich man did not cheat or steal. It was not by wrong doing that he became rich. It was in an honest way. He was the owner of land, and it "brought forth plentifully." Why was He a fool? Oh let us lay it well to heart; he was a fool because he forgot who gave him his riches. He forgot that he had to account for what he did with them. Whatever God gives to man that is more than food to eat, or raiment to put on, He gives for him to share with others. It is not meant by this that the rich man is, after he has kept enough for food, clothes, and house, to give all the rest to the poor. No, this would be doing more harm than good, for he must, if he can, keep the station in which God has placed him; but he must beware of selfishness. He must remember God in all he does, and in all he does not do. He must be glad that he is rich

enough to employ those who earn their bread by labour, glad to help those who cannot work, and very glad that he can help forward the kingdom of God by giving his money to pay for teaching the ignorant in his own country, and in the far-off lands where the gospel of Christ is carried. By thus taking thought for God's service in the good of man, a blessing will be on his riches; and when his soul is required of him, he will leave the cares and anxieties of life,—for no man is free from these,—and will *go home* to his Father's house, to find with Him those true riches which bring with them no care.

How different from the man in the parable! His only thought, when his goods increased, was, where he could store them best *for himself*, that he might spend the rest of his days in selfish pleasure.

He was a fool indeed, for he knew well this life could not last, and yet he made it his only care. He knew well that in any moment he might be forced to leave all behind him; that in a very short time he must leave all behind him, and be carried by death into another world that would last for ever, and yet, for that other world he took no care. No man can be sure that the greatest prudence will make him certain of riches here. We see this every day where we least expect it. The best laid plans are disappointed, and the man who thought he was sure of plenty for his old age, becomes suddenly quite poor. But no man who has truly tried to be rich towards God ever was, or ever can be disappointed. No one can fail whose hopes are in God's keeping.* The poor man must not think that he has

* There was once a man who was born heir to a great estate. His father was a spendthrift, and was soon forced to sell his house and lands to pay his debts. At his death the son found himself with a very small income instead of the large fortune he had expected; but the thing that grieved him most was, that the old family place had passed into other hands. He resolved that it should be the object of his life to save money, and to make money, that he might buy it back. Pinchingly and sparingly he lived where no one knew him. Not a single comfort of life would he allow himself, and every farthing that was not needed for

nothing to do with this parable, because he has no need of house or barn in which to lay up his store,—no riches to lay by. If his heart is set upon the wish for these things, or his peace destroyed by grumbling for the want of them, to him also the parable says, “Thou fool,” for his soul may also in one night be required of him, and then, as the rich man would be nothing bettered by having had all these things, so he would be nothing the worse for the want of them; but *very, very* much the worse for having so set his desires upon them, as to neglect that which would have made him rich in heaven,—the service of God—the care of his soul.

II.

When our Lord had shown the little worth of riches to the man who had asked him to speak to his brother, that He would divide the inheritance with him, and, by a parable had taught every one present to think of the truth they were so apt to forget, that one night, one moment was enough, to strip the

bare necessities, he laid out to the best interest. Time passed on. Fifty years after the estate had been sold, the tenants and neighbours were astonished by being told that it had been bought back by the son of the last owner. They were invited to a great entertainment at the Hall, given by him to celebrate his restoration to the home of his fathers. They found a thin and care-worn old man, who received them with kind hospitality. Mirth and good cheer abounded; and while he feasted with them, he told them how he had lived upon a crust that he might enjoy the happiness he now possessed, of redeeming his inheritance. They all felt for him, and with him, and they parted that night with mutual good will. They were to meet on the morrow to settle some business. Those who were appointed came, but their landlord did not appear.

He was found dead in his bed!

The suddenness of the change had produced its natural effect. He had died in the night, of apoplexy.

All the sacrifices he had made to redeem an earthly inheritance were useless; for it was gone from his grasp in an hour. But the heavenly inheritance, for which few care to make any sacrifice, can never be lost. It has been redeemed for us, its price fully paid; but none but those who truly value it, can enter upon it.

richest of all he had, to send him naked to the grave, without even the power of knowing what was to become of all his riches, he bade them look around on all God's works. He bade them mark how He fed the birds, and clothed the flowers with a beauty that was far beyond the gayest robes of the greatest king. Might they not, from this, learn to trust Him who cared for every thing He had made? Worldly hearts will disquiet themselves for the things of the world, but the children of God may surely find rest in the thought that God is their Father, and that He knoweth what things they have need of.

The Lord Jesus then spoke to those among the crowd whom He knew to be his true disciples, ready to part with all, and to suffer all for his sake. They were a little flock, and the world would soon be in arms against them. They need not fear, for God himself was on their side. They must indeed give up all they had in this world, for the hour was at hand when all that believed would have "all things in common," would sell their possessions and goods, and part "them to all men, as every man had need." (Acts ii. 44, 45.) Jesus knew that time was soon coming, and He said to them beforehand:—

LUKE xii. 32—34. "*Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*"

These are nearly the same words as we have before read in Matt. vi.,* therefore we need not repeat, at this place, what has been said of them before, but let us take earnest heed to the next saying of our Lord, which concerns us much.

LUKE xii. 35—38. "*Let your loins be girded about,*

* Vol. I. p. 207—211.

and your lights burning ; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when He will return from the wedding ; that when He cometh and knocketh, they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching : verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if He shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants."

You will find that our Lord very often made use of this figure to show his disciples their true place in this world. They were to look upon themselves as servants of a Master who, having given to each of them the work He wished them to do, left them for a time, telling them that He would return to take account of their work, and to reward their faithful service. They were to be always ready for him, but no time for his coming could be fixed. This is the first time that our Lord brings this figure before them, and we had better look at its meaning verse by verse. He told his followers that they were to have their loins girded about, and they knew very well the meaning of his words, for instead of clothes like ours, they wore loose dresses, which, when they had any work to do, they were obliged to fasten by drawing tight a girdle or band round their loins. The disciples knew that by telling them to have their loins girded about, He meant them to be always ready for active service.

Their lights were to be burning. We shall see, in a parable afterwards given by our Lord, that the lamp always trimmed, and brightly burning, is a picture of the Christian's state of mind when he so lives as to be ready at a moment's call to join his Lord. A light, not only lightens the man who carries it, but, in some degree, all who are near him. Those who wish

to follow, can see where he is going, and with his light in his hand, while he need not stumble himself, he is ready to help all who may be in trouble by the way. Does not this well express the clear, truthful religion which, like a lamp always trimmed, has its light from God's Holy Spirit; and not only fills the Christian himself with peace and gladness of heart, but enables him to be a guide to those who would wish to leave the ways of sin, but know not how.

What must be done to keep our lights burning? In the word of God, read with earnest prayer for the Spirit of God to teach us, we shall find offered to us the light that is to be our guide, and, in the means of grace, that is, in the Sacraments, and in all the appointed ways of religion, we shall find, as it were, the oil which will make our lamps burn clear and bright. No man, no woman, need sit still in gloomy fear. A bright cheerful light is offered to all; let us be up and be doing: we know not the hour, but we know that soon to each of us our Lord shall come. Death shall knock at our door, and then, before ever we are aware, *Christ the Lord is come*. Let us be always expecting him, not in fear, not as an evil which we would fain escape from if we could, but gladly, joyfully, so that, at the first sound of his feet at the door, we may "open unto him immediately." Then blessed shall we be, if thus found watching; for He has said that He will come to *help*, yes, even to serve those who have waited for him. "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching. Verily I say unto you that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth, and serve them." He comes, at an hour fixed by himself, but which they know not, "in the second or in the third watch," and He finds those of his servants who love him, and who are glad that He is coming, watching for him with their "loins girded about," and their "lights burning," showing their love by their obedience.

Does He come as a hard master, strict to enquire into the

value of the service they have done for him? No; He accepts at once the loving service of their hearts. He needs not what *they* can do for *him*, and his first care is to give to them a thousand times more than they could have asked or hoped; for what master but himself would, on returning to his house, make his servants sit down that he may serve them? By this unexpected part of the parable, Jesus shows us, though in words that cannot now be clear to us, that at his second coming, his faithful loving servants will receive from him, a glory which they cannot now even imagine. His second coming! Yes; our Lord will come again in glory to arouse the dead, and to judge the world. To see who have been watching for him; and who have lived and died forgetting him. But to each of us the hour of our death is also the hour of the second coming of the Lord from heaven, for our state of watching is then ended; our loins may be ungirded, for labour is done; our lights need no longer be kept burning, for the full glory that is brighter than the noon-day sun will shine around each faithful servant of the Lord. Oh let *us* then be of those who love *his appearing*. Though flesh and blood must shrink from the thought of *death*, the faithful, the redeemed Spirit will spring with joy to meet the *coming of the Lord*.

Prayer.

O Christ, my Saviour, let me love thee, so that the thought of thy coming may fill me with joy, and not with fear. Let it be my daily delight to do the work thou hast marked out for me, thankful that thou wilt stoop so low as to be served by me. Let not the hurry of this world's business hinder me from hearing the sounds of thy coming; let not the glare of its pleasures blind me to the signs of thine approach. Lord, thou art near. O give us grace that we may be found with our loins girded, and our lights burning, ready to go out to meet thee, that we may dwell for ever with thee. Amen.

LII.

LUKE xii. 39, 40. "*And this know, (said our Lord), that if the good man of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also : for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.*"

Why did our Lord change the picture of his return from that of a master whose servants were waiting for him, to the secret coming of a thief in the night? The master of the house was welcome to his servants who waited for him, that they might "open unto him immediately;" but the thief is never welcome. He comes while men sleep, to break open the house, and to take away their goods. Why then does our Lord say that He "will come as a thief?" He knows the weakness of our frame, "He remembereth that we are but dust." (Ps. ciii. 14.) He knows that to no man death is welcome; our very nature starts back from the thought. *To die*, is grievous even to the servant of God, for death is the punishment of sin, and had we never sinned, we had never died. Therefore death must always be unwelcome in a house. Even God's children shrink from his coming—but to the worldly-minded He is indeed the loss of all things, for they have no happiness that is not ended by death. To them indeed He comes as a thief comes to break open the house, and to take out of it every thing that is of value. The Lord Jesus knew that in each disciple there were as it were two natures, and therefore that even the most faithful of his followers, to the end of time, would partly long for, and partly dread the hour which would, either by death, or by the second coming of the Lord, end his mortal life. He knew also, how the worldly-minded man takes fright at the idea of that hour, when all must be over with his worldly possessions

and enjoyments, whatever they were ; He knew there was but one cure for the fear of death. That if a man's heart, that is, his chiefest desires, were raised above this world, then death might come, by night or by day, he could do no real harm ; just as a thief at midnight breaking into a house, may alarm those that are within, but cannot take away their treasure, if it has all been before placed in safety. For this reason Jesus said, " Be ye therefore ready also : for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not."

Now it is clearly of great importance to each of us, that we should know *how* we are so to be ready, that the hour, which will come upon us as a thief in the night, may not be able to do us any real harm ; in short, how we are every day so to live that we need not fear even sudden death ?

We may be glad that Peter, at this place, interrupted our Lord by a question —

Verse 41. "*Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even unto all ?*"

We see that the twelve apostles were not yet gone forth on the message Christ had sent them, to preach the Gospel throughout Judea. But a crowd of people had gathered round, and the answer made by Jesus, spoke first to the disciples and to all who like them were appointed to teach, and then to every one, who, taught by them the will of God, had their different duties given them in God's household.

Verses 42—48. "*And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season ? Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But and if that servant say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his*

coming; and shall begin to beat the men-servants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; the lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

What is it this parable tells us? Surely this, that the only way to be ready against the coming of our Lord, is to do with diligence the duties of the station of life God has marked out for us. Words easily spoken—but, if really fulfilled, containing in themselves the whole Christian religion—for to live doing the Lord's will, and watching for his coming, is to be a Christian indeed. But is it so with us? Let each of us, before we pass on, stop awhile, and put to ourselves the solemn question—Do I so live? Do I so watch? We cannot plead that we know not our Lord's will? We do, or at least we may know it, for his word is in our hands. Week after week it is read and explained to us in the Church; in our own houses we may ponder over it. We cannot say that we know not our Lord's will. It is not ignorance; it is unwillingness: but let us rouse up in time. He is coming. The sound of his feet is at the door. Friend after friend is called away to meet him. How do we know but that our turn may be the next. Let us be wise in time, and now, at this very moment, calmly ask ourselves, each one of us apart, what is my duty in the household of my Lord? * Am I a parent? Am I a master or a mistress?

* There is not one single duty in our daily lives, however little they may have

Have I *any one* who looks to me to guide him, to shew him what is right, to warn him from what is wrong? How do I fulfil the duty? And my own time! how am I using it? My money! how am I spending it? My thoughts! my hopes! my fears! upon what are they fixed? Am I doing my Lord's business; that is, am I doing the plain duties of my place in life, *whatever that may be*? remembering that it is my Lord who has given me those duties to do! Or am I spending life, time, thoughts, and money, if I have it, in sinful pleasures, in worldly cares, in following out my own will instead of the will of God? Am I doing *good* or *harm* to those around me, by my own acts towards them, or even by my example?

Let me read over again the parables of Jesus spoken at this time, (Luke xii. 34—50,) and let me take good heed that I am not of those who, because our Lord seems for a time to delay his coming, forget that He surely will come at an hour when I am not aware, and appoint me my portion with the unbelievers.

Dreadful doom! Why am I so mad, when I know that I must die; why am I so mad that I do not live as one who waits, not for death as an evil, but for the coming of my Lord, who will bless me far beyond my understanding, if only He finds that I have been watchful for his coming?

Let me remember too, that unto "whomsoever much is given, of him much will be required."

to do with religion, that may not, by God's help, be done for God; and therefore be a part of the service we owe him, and in which we may still watch for his coming. But I appeal to the *common sense* of any one, whether, in the turmoil of the needless cares, or in the mad excitement of the pursuit of gain or pleasure, it is possible so to serve God as to be watching for his coming, and ready for a sudden call to meet him. Common sense at once will answer, No. Yet there are many pleasures open to the servant of God, which need not cause him to forget, that in any one moment he may be called away; which need not prevent him, when his Lord doth come, from opening to him immediately. Happy would it be for us to remember the purpose for which we are created! This purpose is beautifully expressed in the first question and answer of the Catechism of the Church of Scotland. 'What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.'

Have I who read these lines had many opportunities of knowing God's will? Oh let me take heed that I do it!—There is but one way. It is this! To live in constant prayer and in careful self-examination, comparing our manner of life with the *word of God itself*. Religious books may mislead, for the men who write them may be carried into error by the strength of their own opinions; but the humble earnest service of a meek and lowly spirit, seeking for knowledge in God's written word, and for strength in his holy sacraments, and in all the appointed means of grace, will not, cannot be deceived, for God has promised that whoever seeks shall find him, that the blood of his Son shall cleanse from every stain, and that He will *give* eternal life to all who believe in him. This hath God promised! The earth, and all things in it shall pass away, but the word of our God abideth for ever.*

LIII.

LUKE XII. MATTHEW X; XI.

LUKE xii. 49. "*I am come (said the Lord Jesus) to send fire upon earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?*"

* In Rev. xvi. 15, it is written, "Behold I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." If you are in earnest to see in what state you must be, when ready to meet your Lord, you cannot do better than search the Scripture till you find the meaning of this passage. For those who have not bibles with references I will give some that appear to me to show, that this garment or raiment means the purity of life, the holiness of heart man has not by nature, but which will be given to every one who really seeks it from God through Christ the Saviour. Man, in his natural state, does not know that he is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and *naked*; therefore God counsels him in his holy word to go to him for the true riches, and for white raiment, that he may be clothed. Rev. iii. read from 15—22; also from the middle of the 1st verse to the end of the 5th; xix. 8; vii. from 13 to the end. Isaiah i. 16—19; Heb. ix. 14; Ps. xli. 7.

Was the religion of the God of peace and love a fire? And could Jesus, the merciful, the kind, rejoice that He had already kindled it? Yes. But though it was a fire which would burn, and spread over the whole earth, it would only destroy the dross: it would cleanse it, even as silver and gold is cleansed in the furnace, and refine away the sin that has mixed itself with all that is in the world. But before this could be, Christ must suffer. He foresaw the fire that would go forth from the sparks He was now kindling in men's minds.* The time that was to come lay clear before his sight; the world in him was to be new born. He was the second Adam: the first man of the family of men restored to the favour of God, in which the image of God would be "new created unto righteousness:" but His baptism must be of blood, for sin must be atoned, before it could be blotted out; and the Saviour longed for the time when "He, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man," "that through death, He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil." (Heb. iii. 9, 14.)

He said:—

Verse 50. *"But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened * till it be accomplished."*

Blessed Saviour! He did not shrink from the baptism of blood that was before him! He knew the sufferings through which the plan of salvation was to be made perfect, and He felt pained till it was accomplished, fully carried out.

He again warned his disciples of the trials they would meet with for the sake of his religion. They must depend upon no family love to shield them from danger, for on the contrary—"A man's foes, (his greatest enemies,) would be those of his own household."

He added, that this must be no reason for shrinking from openly acknowledging him to be their Lord:—

* Pained. Bible margin.

MATTHEW X. 37—39. "*He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me : and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, (that is, he that is not willing to suffer for my sake) and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it : and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*"

To all who would show his disciples kindness for his sake, the Lord Jesus said, He would look upon that kindness as done to himself. It is the motive of the heart God looks upon, and what is done for his sake is done unto himself. (Matt. xxv. 34—41.) Therefore He said unto them :—

Verses 40—42. "*He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward ; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.*"

What comfort there is in the meaning of these words for all who love God. All who receive the disciples of Christ, doing so *because* they are his disciples, shall have the same blessing as if they had received into their homes God himself. All who show kindness, even in a trifle, to God's people, doing so *because* they are his people, shall be themselves counted as his own, and shall receive the same reward. And even the houseless wanderer, who has not where to lay his head, may so receive them ; for he may so open his heart and his affections to the love of God as, for his sake, to shew kindness to all who are his. Even a cup of cold water thus given shall not lose its reward.

When we think of the greatness and of the majesty of the Lord God of heaven and earth, and consider the tender kindness with which He accepts, and even rewards, as worthy service, the feeble love, the small acts by which we can show our wish to serve him ; should not our hearts within us swell with gratitude ? A mother's tenderness prizes as rich gifts, the trifles brought her by her little child. The Mighty God blesses and rewards the offerings of a loving heart.

MATTHEW xi. 1. *"And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities."*

MARK vi. 12, 13. *"And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them" (everywhere.)*

It seems that when the Saviour had thus sent his apostles away from him, to carry the good news of his gospel throughout all the land of Judea, He himself made a round through the villages and cities for the very same purpose.

Now indeed the whole country rang with the fame of Jesus, and the doctrines He taught were everywhere spoken of. King Herod in his court heard of him and trembled.

We must leave awhile the history of the Lord Jesus, that we may hear how the imprisonment and the life of John the Baptist ended together. Most true had been his words when speaking of Christ, he said—"He must increase, but I must decrease." That is, as his Ministry grows brighter and brighter, mine must wane and fade away. The mission of John was like that of the morning star, which shines awhile to tell the day is coming, and then fades before the rising sun ; its more feeble light lost in "the brightness of his coming."

Prayer.

O God, our Saviour, we fall down before thee in humble adoration, and in grateful love. We are not worthy even to be called thy servants, for we are as nothing, full of sin, and feeble in our best endeavours. We have nothing of our own, for all is thine, and unless we continually receive from thee, we are undone. Thy gifts must be new, not only every morning but with every breath we draw; yet thou dost accept as kindness to thyself the least act of kindness done, for thy sake, to thy people. Oh, how is it that we *can* forget thee? How is it that the glare of this false world can so cheat our senses, that we dream of happiness out of thee? "Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things;" without whom we cannot so much as think what is right, grant unto us the Spirit of holiness, so that our lives and all that we have, may be gladly yielded unto thee: then shall peace possess our hearts; then shall we glorify thee on earth, and enjoy thee for ever in heaven. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

LIV.

The Baptist John was still shut up in prison, but the day of his deliverance was at hand. Herod feared him. He feared his power over the minds of the people. He feared him as the servant of the holy God, who boldly reprov'd him for his evil deeds: but this very fear held back his hand. He shut him up in prison, but he would not take his life. Herodias, the wicked woman, who was at once Herod's sister-in-law, and his wife, whom he had taken by force from his brother Philip to be his own, hated John as much as she feared him. She cared nothing for his being the servant of God, or for his reproofs. She cared nothing for the power he had over the people's minds, but she

cared greatly for the power he might have over Herod's mind, for she knew that he "observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly." Might not this feeling that Herod had for John grow stronger? and might he not one day listen to him, and break the sinful bond of his unlawful marriage with her? So long as the Baptist lived, there was fear of this, and Herodias was determined that he should die. At the very beginning of his imprisonment "she would have killed him," but up to this time "she could not." No doubt she had tried all the arts a wicked woman could try; she had not been able to have her way, and John still lived. His prison was in the strong-hold of Machærus, built on the edge of Herod's country, which it divided from Arabia Petrea, the country belonging to Aretas, the father-in-law of Herod.* We know this from history,† and from the same history we know that Herod at this time marched his army against the king of Arabia, who had made war upon him, that he might force him to take back his daughter, who was his rightful wife.‡

It is most likely that this war was the reason why it came to pass that Herod and his court were in the same place where John lay shut up in prison.§ Within the walls of Machærus Herod had a palace,|| and it may be that, resting there awhile with his army, Herod being again within reach of his prisoner, the wretched Herodias more than ever feared the power he might gain over him. Her bloody purpose was accomplished in a strange manner.

By means of feasting and dancing, the Baptist found*the death that set him free from the power of Herod, and from the hatred of his wicked wife.

It was Herod's birth-day, and there was a feast at court. Herodias had a young daughter, whose grace and beauty she

* Aretas, king of Arabia, was the father of Herod's wife, who he had put away that he might marry Herodias.

† Josephus.

‡ Ibid.

§ Biblical Cyclopedia.

|| Josephus.

made use of as a means to keep her power over the uneasy mind of the guilty king. It is written :—

MATTHEW XIV. 6, 7. “ *But when Herod’s birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.*”

He had fallen into the snare that had been so artfully laid for him. Herodias knew beforehand that the king would be pleased by this dance ; perhaps she made him feel that nothing but the desire to do honour to his birth-day could have made her allow her daughter, a young maiden, and a princess, to dance in this public manner before all the court. The girl may have been worthy of her mother, and without fear or shame, have carried out her odious scheme ; or she may have been forced to obey her commands. Very young she must have been, and cold-blooded cruelty is so unnatural in a young girl, that we may hope she acted against her will. At all events, she knew what she had to do, and she did it, for it is written :—

Verses 8—11. “ *She, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist’s head in a charger. And the king was sorry : nevertheless for the oath’s sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her. And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel ; and she brought it to her mother.*”

These few verses bring before our minds two very different pictures. First, we seem to see before us Herod’s court, bright with lights and jewels, glittering with gold and silver, with his lords and captains in their splendid eastern dresses doing honour to the royal birthday. We see before us the proud triumphant look of the sinful woman who called herself the queen ; the troubled brow of Herod, listening to these cruel words, “ Give

me here John Baptist's head in a charger." How ill they suit the young face, the girlish form of her who speaks them. Herod's brow is dark and troubled, but he yields. The executioner receives his orders and departs upon his dreadful errand. If we follow him in thought, how different is the scene! The prison in the dark and quiet hour of night. The servant of God sleeps in peace, waiting the hour of his deliverance. It is at hand. More than a year he has been within these prison walls. He is still young,* but never more shall his voice sound through the wilderness. His work is done. He has prepared the way for one mightier than himself, (Luke iii. 16,) there is nothing more for him now to do. The orders of Herod cannot take him by surprise. There is no time for prayer; but there is no need, for Christ himself has said that John was "more than a prophet." The hour of freedom has come, his head is delivered to the daughter of Herodias, and his spirit has risen to the rejoicing bands of angels who welcome to the throne of God the forerunner of their Lord.

Truly the things belonging to the kingdom of God can never be judged by what is *seen* in this world. When kings die, and those whom men call great, though they may have been wicked and cruel in their lives, there is no sign of the evil they have done in the luxury and pomp that surrounds their dying beds. Each word they speak is repeated; and, while life lasts within them, they fill the thoughts of the multitude who delight to hear from hour to hour of all that is said and done within the chambers of the great. When all is over, and they are carried to the tomb, men crowd to their funeral to gaze upon their magnificence; and monuments are raised over them that are a sight even to their children's children.

When John the Baptist died at midnight, within the walls of a prison, by the sword of the executioner, not a single friend

* John the Baptist was only six months older than Jesus, therefore, at his death he could scarcely be thirty-two.

was there to say how he met the stroke of death. Of his funeral, all we know is this, that

MATTHEW XIV. 12. "*His disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it.*"

Yet we have the witness of the Son of God himself, that, "Among them that are born of woman, there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist." (Matt. xi. 11.)

We should do wrong if we turned from this sad history without considering the cause why Herod beheaded John the Baptist. We have read that "the king was very sorry : nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat," he did it.

Now was he right or wrong for the sake of a rash oath, to sin against his conscience, and to murder one whom he knew "to be a just man and an holy?" (Mark vi. 20.) It is needful for us to be clear in our understanding of this matter, for a rash promise or vow is often made a reason, even by well-meaning persons, for doing wrong, or for leaving some duty undone.*

Now the plain truth is simply this, a sin cannot be made less by committing a greater sin. If we have done wrong by making a rash promise or vow, we shall only do a greater wrong by keeping it. What we ought to do is quite plain. We

* This is a mistake into which persons in every rank of life are apt to fall. I remember an instance in cottage-life, which will well show how great the error is. A mother was asked how it was that with the power of sending her children to school, they were all growing up unable to read? She made reply, 'My eldest boy went for a time to school, but his father often took him off his books; I was so angry, that at last I said, in a great passion, that if he ever kept him from school again I would never send him or any other child to be taught at all. He did it just the same, and so I have never sent any of them to school again. It was very wrong of me, and I am *very sorry, but I cannot go against my word.*'

In every rank of life, from the cottage to the palace of King Herod, much misery has been often caused by the weak feeling, that even a sinful promise must be kept, instead of being repented of as any other known sin.

ought to repent before God, and confess before man the sin of our rashness. And this we do when we take shame and grief for it to ourselves, and refuse to carry it on by fulfilling the words we ought never to have spoken.

In the words of St. Mark, Herod "sware unto" the daughter of Herodias, "Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom." This seems to have been a common practice among the kings of the East; but what right had they to make promises that might put in danger the lives and happiness of half the people in their dominions? When Herod found, what was asked, "he was very sorry," but gave way to false shame, and rather than be looked upon as a prince who had promised what he would not fulfil, "he sent and beheaded John in the prison." By this act of sinful weakness, he clouded over still more the remainder of his wretched life, and the Baptist dead became a still greater fear to him than the Baptist living.* (Matt. xiv. 1, 2.)

Let each of us be warned and instructed by this history, and if in a moment of passion we have rashly made a sinful promise or resolution, let us bewail the fault in humble penitence before God, and let us prove our repentance by refusing to carry out the sin we had intended, when we made the promise.

IV.

MATT. XIV. MARK VI. LUKE IX.

It is written that, when John's disciples had buried him, "they went and told Jesus," and that

* The ambition of Herodias at last became Herod's ruin and her own. He was weak enough to be ruled by her, and in a vain attempt to gain the title of king, which was never *really* his, though he was commonly called king, he fell under the displeasure of the Emperor of Rome, who took his country from him, and banished him and his guilty wife to Lyons, a city in France; where they both ended their days.

MATTHEW XIV. 13. "*When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart.*"

But He went not alone, for St. Mark 'tells us, that at this time the twelve apostles returned from their mission.

MARK VI. 30—32. "*And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. And He said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while : for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately.*"

Jesus knew the need of rest for mind and body, but it could not be,—the people had found their need of him. They believed that his bodily presence was necessary to them, and they were resolved that they would follow him wherever He went. It is written :—

Verse 33. "*And the people saw them (Jesus and his apostles) departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all the cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him.*"

Was Jesus vexed or displeased with their eagerness, which entirely prevented the short rest He sought for himself and his apostles ? As soon as the ship touched the other side of the lake, He found its desert shores covered with people who had come on foot round the head of the lake, and were there before him. Did He reprove them and send them away ? Very different were his feelings, very different his conduct.

Verses 34—38. "*And Jesus when He came out (of the ship) saw much people, and was moved with compassion towards them, because they were as sheep not having a*

shepherd : and He began to teach them many things. And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed : send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread : for they have nothing to eat. He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, shall we go and buy two hundred penny-worth of bread, and give them to eat ? He said unto them, How many loaves have ye ? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes."*

We see from this answer how small and how simple was the store that was thought enough for the wants of Jesus and his twelve apostles. They had gone into a desert place apart that they might rest awhile, for where they were "they had no leisure so much as to eat. And yet all they had taken with them by way of provisions for the time, was "five barley-loaves and two small fishes." (John vi. 9.)

St. John in his account of what took place at this time, gives some words of the Lord Jesus, which are left out by the other writers of the gospels, but which we shall do well to note, for they seem to show us the particular care that Jesus took of the minds of each one of his apostles, and also they bring him before us as their familiar friend, as well as their master and Lord. St. John writes :—

JOHN VI. 5—7. "*When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, He said unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat ? And this He said to prove him : for He himself knew what He would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred penny-*

* A sum amounting to £6 5s. according to the margin of the Bible, which states the Roman penny then in use, to be sevenpence halfpenny of our money.

worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little."

Each heart is open as a book before God. He reads therein the most secret thought. He sees what is wanting as well as what is there, and He sends us trials great and small, that we may learn to know ourselves. The question Jesus put to Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat," was to *prove him*—to cause him to put into words (that he might himself know it) his want of depending trust in Christ his Lord. It is true that he was one of his apostles. He had just been teaching in his name, and in his name had done many wonderful works, but he had not yet learned to trust in Him at all times and in all places. His simple answer, "two hundred penny-worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little," showed that he took our Lord's words, "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?" as he would the question of any other man perplexed by the impossibility of finding food for thousands in the desert.

Peter also, when he examined into the little store of five loaves and two small fishes, said most naturally, "What are these among so many?" There is something touching to our hearts in the words of the apostles, speaking among themselves, to each other, and to their Lord. We are glad to find them so like ourselves; and each time the Saviour speaks to them by name, as a man speaks to his familiar friend, it sends a thrill through the believer's heart. Oh could we hear him thus pronounce our names! If we are his, we shall,—for our names are written in his Book of Life. (Rev. xx. 12, 15.) But how shall we know it? Just as the disciples knew they were his. What made the difference between them and the Pharisees, who hated him, the Sadducees who despised him, and the unthinking crowd who wondered at him, but "cared for none of his reproofs, and would none of his counsel?" It was their love to him, their

obedience to his commands, their willingness to serve him *in any way* He appointed for them; their trust in Him *whatever He did*; their belief in *whatever He said*; it was this that made them his disciples, and it must be love, obedience, trust, and belief like theirs, that will make us his disciples.

“ Then stedfast let us still remain,
 Though dangers rise around,
 And in the work prescribed by God
 Yet more and more abound;
 Assured that though we labour now
 We labour not in vain,
 But through the grace of heaven’s great Lord
 The eternal crown shall gain.”

LVI.

MATT. XIV. MARK VI. LUKE IX. JOHN VI.

When Jesus had listened to Philip’s answer, and to Andrew’s words,

MARK vi. 39. “ *He commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass.*”

“ Now there was much grass in the place.” “ So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.”

MARK vi. 40, 41. “ *And they sat down in ranks, (or parties,*) by hundreds and by fifties. And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, He looked up to*

* The word which in our English Bibles is given as “ ranks,” Wiclif translates “ by parties.” The word in the Greek language, in which the gospel was written, is taken from the flower-beds of a garden regularly arranged. These different meanings all help us, as it were, to see in our minds the things which happened.—Trench, p. 265.

heaven and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided He among them all."

What a picture is here! Five thousand wearied men ranged around upon the green grass, and with them, women and their children. (Matt. xiv. 21.) In the midst of them the Saviour, with the apostles by his side. Before him were the five loaves, and the two small fishes with which he was about to feed so great a multitude. Did he command the little store to become a heap? He looked up to heaven, from whence the blessing of his presence came, and then He blessed the bread, and it became enough for all! The more He gave, the more there was to give—his sacred hands divided the two fishes among them all! How divinely simple are the works of God! Is it not thus, by the blessing that comes down from heaven, that the grain in our fields is multiplied? Man sows, and reaps a hundred fold; but because this is yearly done, and he sees the sprouting root and the ripening grain, he forgets it is the hand of God that works by what his goodness has made the law of nature.

Jesus, the Son of God, while He was on earth, by a word, a touch, a look, shewed that He was, as it were, the well-spring of all the goodness and the power which, gently and continually flowing upon the earth, fills it with food and gladness. His miracles did, in one moment, that which his power and goodness is more slowly doing every day of every year.*

MATTHEW xiv 20. "*And they did all eat and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained, twelve baskets full.*"

St. John tells us that—

* See Vol. i. p. 110.

JOHN vi. 12, 13. "*When they (the disciples) were filled, Jesus said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.*"

There was no deed, no word of our blessed Lord but had its reason. Why did He who, by a word, could so increase five loaves that they were more than enough to feed "five thousand men, besides women and children:" why did He command his disciples to take so much care of the broken pieces that were left? Surely it was to teach us that the power of having plenty gives no excuse for waste, and that when God's blessing sends to us abundance, we must account to him for the use we make of all that is over and above our daily wants. This is a thing we continually forget; and if we see plenty around us, we think there is no need of care. From what does this arise? Like all our other sins, from want of a realizing faith. Did we *feel* continually the *presence* of our Lord, we should not be careless of the goods his blessing gives; we should follow his command and see "that nothing be lost." We defraud him, the Giver of all, when we waste; for He has a purpose for every thing, even for the fragments. Does not this thought give a dignity to our household cares? and is it not a delight to think that the faithful servant of God may look up to him from his common work and say, "My Saviour, I obey thy commands; when I endeavour, that *nothing* may be lost."

Nothing may be lost! Oh what words are these in a spendthrift world like ours, where it seems the boast of all who can, to lose every thing;—Their time in busy idleness, their money in selfish folly. And rich and poor are guilty of this folly. It is true that the industrious poor but seldom waste either food or money; they feel that they have but little of their own, and

they must be careful of that little ; but are they always equally careful of that which is not their own ? Do they watch over the property of others, that nothing may be spoiled, and nothing may be lost ?

And has any one any thing of his own ? Can the richest among us say of a single thing, " This will be mine an hour hence ? " He knows he cannot.

The thousands who followed Christ into the wilderness had not a loaf among them, but He gave them plenty. It was theirs to supply their wants, but it was not theirs to waste ; and therefore He said unto his disciples, " Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." And this command of his will be remembered and obeyed by every one of his true disciples while the world lasts. Those only who care not for him will go on in thoughtless waste of the blessings He has given. It was evening. Night was coming, for the day was far spent before the Lord Jesus had made the people sit down upon the grass, that by a miracle he might find them food. He had gone into the desert with his disciples that they might rest awhile. The eagerness of the crowd had brought them to the place before He even reached it, but his soul longed for communion with his Father in the quiet evening-hour.

MATTHEW XVI. 22. " *And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.*"

The people were not willing to be gone. They could no longer doubt that this was the Messiah. Here was a sign in the presence of many thousands who had actually been fed by him, in the desert, by a miracle quite as wonderful as that by which their fathers had been fed in the wilderness by bread from heaven. Had not Moses declared to them, " The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, like unto me " ? (Deut. xviii. 15.) Behold this is He ! A second Moses ! A leader

of the people under whom they could never want ! Such words as these passed from man to man amongst the crowd. It is written :—

JOHN vi. 14—16. “ *Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, He departed again into a mountain himself alone. And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea, and entered into a ship.*”

Prayer.

O Thou who didst look up to heaven and bring a blessing down, by which the little store became enough to satisfy the wants of thousands, still we depend on thee for nourishment for our bodies and our souls. Make us to feel our need of thee ; make us willing to leave behind, our pleasures and our cares, that we may follow thee. And oh ! do thou supply our wants, and let the fulness, the abundance of thy mercies teach us, that thou art indeed our Lord, our Saviour and our King ; our all in all for ever. Amen.

LVII.

MATTHEW XIV. MARK VI. JOHN VI.

The disciples were not willing to leave their Lord so soon. They had but just returned to him : they could not bear to be parted from him again, though only for a night.* This might be one reason why it was needful for Jesus to *constrain* them, that is, oblige them to go ; but it is likely that they knew the purpose of the people to make him a king, even though it

* St. Chrysostom.

might be against his will, and as this was exactly to their mind, so they were most unwilling to be parted from their master in the very hour, as they thought it, of the beginning of his greatness.† As well might they have hoped to turn the mid-day sun from its course, as to turn Jesus from the fulfilment of his Father's will. He sent the people away, and He constrained his disciples to cross over to the other side, while He withdrew himself from the tumult and went apart to pray. It had been what we call the afternoon when the disciples had first proposed to send the multitude away to find food for themselves in the far-off villages and towns, for at that time "the day *began* to wear away," but the evening that was come when "the disciples went down into the sea" to get on board their ship, was the beginning of night, "for it was now dark, and Jesus was not come unto them." Night falls quickly in the land of the East, and darkness often covers the vallies and plains, while the mountain-tops are still glittering in the light of the setting sun.

MATTHEW xiv. 23. "*And when He (Jesus) had sent the multitudes away, He went into a mountain apart to pray : and when the evening was come, He was there alone.*"

JOHN vi. 17. (For his disciples had) "*entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark.*"

MATTHEW xiv. 24. "*But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves : for the wind was contrary.*"

JOHN vi. 18. "*And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew.*"

Jesus was in calm communion with his Father, for *his* hour of prayer must have been the meeting of the Father and the Son. A short and precious meeting, from which *his human nature* drew strength for all He had to endure. The people wished to take him by force, to make him a king ;—He *knew*

* Trench.

that his kingdom of glory, which they might share with him, must begin by his death upon the cross.

When care and grief weigh hard upon us, and we kneel down to pray, by and bye our load is lightened, and we feel our souls refreshed, our spirits calmed. If prayer such as *we* can raise can bring such a blessing down, what must have been the power of the Saviour's prayer! But even while thus, as it were, alone with God his Father, he did not forget his disciples, whose faith he had tried by sending them away from him. From the mountain—

MARK vi. 48. "*He saw them toiling in rowing ; for the wind was contrary unto them.*"

MATTHEW xiv. 25. "*And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.*"

JOHN vi. 19. "*So when they had rowed about five and twenty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship : and they were afraid.*"

MARK vi. 48. "*He cometh unto them, . . . and would have passed by them.*"

Amidst the uproar of the wind, and the dashing of the sea, through the darkness and the storm, calmly moving on through the raging water, they see him, but they know him not. Filled with terror, "they supposed it had been a Spirit." What but a Spirit could find a pathway through the foaming deep?

MATTHEW xiv. 26, 27. "*And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit ; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer ; it is I ; be not afraid.*"

Oh the joy of that moment! to hear the Saviour's voice amidst the storm, "It is I, be not afraid!" At once their fears were gone. They were safe, the Lord was near—the storm

might rage, it could not hurt them now: the mysterious shape, so calmly moving through the tossing waves, was no spirit to fright them, but Jesus their Friend and Master; in spite of the roaring wind they heard his voice, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. Then Peter, who, we shall find, was always foremost when he thought any thing was to be done to show his love by braving danger, said—

MATTHEW XIV. 28, 29. *"Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus."*

Yes, while his eager love and stedfast faith were fixed on Jesus, power like His was given him, and he walked to Jesus, even as Jesus had walked to them, upon the water: but the fury of the tempest turned his thoughts from *Christ the Saviour* to the dangers of the way, and—

Verses 30—33. *"When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God."*

JOHN VI. 21. *"And immediately the ship was at the land whither they went."*

MARK VI. 51, 52. *"And they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered. For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened."*

When Jesus had fed them with the few loaves, which his blessing had made enough for the multitude, they had said, "This is

of a truth that prophet which should come into the world," and they would, if they could, have "taken him by force to make him a king;" but their thoughts had been still of worldly power and greatness: *now*, for a moment at least, they caught sight of what He really was, and falling at his feet, they worshipped the Son of God. Perhaps they remembered these words in that beautiful Psalm, when David speaking to God says, "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known." (Ps. lxxvii. 19.)

Let us now look back upon our Lord's dealings that night with his disciples, and then think if they do not show us how to understand his dealings with ourselves.

Jesus sent his disciples from him, though it was growing dark, and He knew a storm was coming. (John vi. 18) When they had before been overtaken by a tempest, He was with them in the ship, and though He slept, his presence might assure them of their safety; but now they were to learn to trust him though they did not see him. They were to learn that neither distance nor darkness could hide them from his love, and that when their danger grew the greatest, then the Saviour was nearest. He saw them from the mountain-top, and "immediately he went unto them, walking on the water," for when help seems impossible to man, it is easy to God—the very things that cause danger and distress are often the things that bring Jesus nearest. But they knew him not, and were only the more afraid till He spoke; for it needs the voice of Christ, saying, "It is I, be not afraid," to give even his disciples confidence that it is indeed He, their Redeemer, who is coming to them in every trial. Before He spoke, it seemed as though He would "have passed by them," but when "they cried out for fear, He stopped," and immediately He spake unto them, and said unto them, "Be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid;" for even when his people do not understand his dealings with them, his ear is open to their cry, and He

will speak peace and comfort to them. There was a striking lesson to Peter, in the natural fear that overcame his faith, in the very moment of the trial to which he had exposed himself. It might have told him, not rashly to run into needless danger ; it might have taught him the weakness of his nature, in spite of his boldness and even of his faith. Even faith should not lead man into needless trial, for his strength is but weakness, and his only safety is in the cry, "Lord, save me, or I perish."

And does not all this speak to us ? Oh yes, Christ has left his people for a while, but his eyes are upon them. Like the ship amidst the waves, the Christian Church is tossed by many a storm, but the Saviour watches over it, the children of God are safe in it. In danger and distress He comes to them, and when their fears are greatest, He whispers to their hearts, "It is I, be not afraid." They may have toiled long and vainly, but when they have "willingly received him," then their troubles are ended, and soon they will be in a safe and peaceful harbour.

LVIII.

When Jesus had sent away the people, before He went up into the mountain to pray, many of them had spent the night near the place, or had come back to it in the morning. They had seen that his disciples had gone away in the only ship that was in that place, and as He had remained alone, they hoped to find him still there. The people sought for Jesus in the desert, and when they could not find him, they crossed the lake in some boats that had come (about the same time as they) from the city of Tiberias.

It is then written :—

JOHN vi. 22—25. "*The day following, when the people*

which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one into which his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples were gone away alone ; Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias, nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks : When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to (the city of) Capernaum, seeking for Jesus. And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither ? ”*

Our Lord did not choose to tell them how and when he had crossed the sea. They had seen him feed thousands by a miracle in the desert, and this had filled them with the desire to make him their king. They might have known by all they had heard and seen that He indeed had the power of God in him, and would teach them how to be saved ; but it was not for this they followed him ; it was because they thought that while with him they were sure never to want, for he could at any time work a miracle and give them all they needed. It was this thought which made them seek him now ; not the desire to be taught by him. Therefore—

Verses 26, 27. “ *Jesus answered them, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you : for him hath God the Father sealed.* ”

In these words the Lord Jesus showed the people that He knew their inmost thoughts, how anxious they were for the

* The word Rabbi, means one who teaches.

things of this short life, and how little they cared for the things of the life to come, though they knew it would never end. He told them to raise their thoughts and wishes higher, and to labour or work for that which He, the Son of man, would give them. He was indeed their Messiah. The long looked-for had come at last, and even as a man's writing may be known from the writings of all other men, by the seal he puts upon it, so might He (Jesus) be known to be the Son of God, by the seal his Father had set upon him. This seal was, not only that He fulfilled all the prophets had spoken of him long before, but, that the power of God was plainly in him, as it never had been in mortal man since the beginning. "The Father, even God," had set His seal upon him, when He bore witness to him by a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He set his seal upon him in each of the miracles in which Jesus, acting in no name but his own, showed that He and the Father were one.

It seems as though the words of Jesus struck the people ; for when He said unto them, "Labour (or work) not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life ;" they immediately answered :—

Verse 28. *"What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?"*

It is nearly two thousand years ago since that question was asked by the people who stood round the Messiah, and ever since, and always now, that question rises to the lips of every one who has found out how vain it is to labour for the meat that perisheth ; how vain it is to wear away our lives and happiness, in trying to take a firm hold of those things that perish even in our grasp.

What shall we do that we may work the works of God ? Listen to the answer of him whose words are truth :—

JOHN vi. 29. "*Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom He hath sent.*"

Yes! this is the work of God, the work which alone can bring peace and rest; all else is but as the meat which perisheth; this alone can satisfy the hunger of the longing soul which has been awakened to feel its need of the life that is for ever.

And it is the work of God. Easy it may seem, for in words it sounds easy to believe on him whom God hath sent, but to believe with the heart unto salvation is the gift of God, and none can so believe who are not taught of him.

Blessed be his name, He never has, and never will, refuse this precious gift to those who ask it of him. Why then do we wear our lives away in labouring for the things that perish? for the things that even, while we have them, bring with them more care than peace? Above all, why do those who seem to follow Christ in anxiety to find the kingdom of God, like the people of old to whom Jesus spoke,—why do they refuse simply to receive the gospel? Why do they, like the Pharisees, vainly seek to find some work of their own which may seem to make them fit for God's favour? Why not listen to the words of his own Son, who *must* know his will, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom He hath sent." There has always been the same unwillingness; for it belongs to the natural heart of man. By the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, chap. lv., God in his loving-kindness had long before called upon his people to come unto him, and receive, as *a gift*, that pardon and peace which they can neither buy nor earn for themselves, and both Christ and his evangelists in the gospel of glad tidings again and again repeat the call.

The people perceived that this belief, which the Lord Jesus demanded from them, was something much beyond what had been required by any of their ancient prophets; and they asked

what sign he had to give, that could compare with the sign that had been given to their fathers in the old time. Moses had fed them with manna, two millions of people in the desert, for forty years : could the miracle of Christ in feeding five thousand persons, once, with five barley-loaves, be at all compared to this ?

JOHN VI. 30—33. “ *They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee ; what dost thou work ? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert ; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven ; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.*”

We may observe that when the Lord Jesus spoke his most solemn truths, He almost always began by the words, Verily, verily,* as if to call upon his hearers to listen with the greatest attention. Let us listen with the greatest attention to his words now, for “ they are spirit, and they are life ;” they will give life to our souls. “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven.” The manna which fed the children of Israel in the wilderness was created by a miracle, by God’s command, that it might be food for the people ; but it was not bread from heaven. It was food for their bodies, it did nothing for their souls. “ But,” said the Lord Jesus, “ my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.” Yes, God was now offering to his people the true bread from heaven ; “ for the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.” Why does Jesus call himself “ bread,” the bread of God ? Because he is, to the hungry soul, what bread is to the hungry body. The starving man

* Truly, and of a truth.

is weak in body and faint in heart ; his eyes fail, he cannot see ; his limbs are feeble, he cannot work. Not the best news that could be told him could give him any joy ; he must have food, or he must die. Give him but a morsel of bread, and he will revive ; the pain will pass from his head, the sickness from his heart ; his eyes will brighten, and soon his limbs will find their strength. This will bread do for the body ; and this, and more than this, will Jesus the Saviour do for the soul. Receive him into the heart in loving child-like trust, and the weary sense of need that has hindered all gladness of spirit, the fear that, like a heavy weight, has lain upon the soul, preventing the service of a willing mind—all this will pass away, and the believer in Christ the Saviour will find that a mist is gone from his eyes—he can see how God can be just and yet justify him, a sinner—how, though there is nothing good in himself, he will yet, by the power of God, be made able to render Him good service. And, if this bread which the Father giveth from heaven has not been found till life itself is passing away, Oh, more than ever will the dying sinner find that it is life to his soul to believe on him whom God hath sent to be his Saviour. Let him take Christ into his heart for the very purpose the starving man would take bread into his body—that he may live—and he will live ;—yea though he die, he shall live for evermore, and that which men call death shall be to him the beginning of eternal life, for he shall be one with Christ, and, dying with him to sin, with him he shall rise again ; for Christ has conquered death, and it is swallowed up in life.

Prayer.

Lord ! I believe, help thou mine unbelief. Thou camest down from heaven to give life to the world. Oh give me to receive thee into my heart as the starving man would receive the bread which he must eat, or die. We are journeying through the

wilderness of life, for though the world is fair to look upon, it yields nothing that can support our souls; *that* must come from heaven; and *that* thou art, the true bread of God which the Father hath given us. O let us not then labour for the things that perish, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life. "This is the work of God, that we believe on him whom He hath sent." O let this work be accomplished in us, that evermore we may live to thee, by thee, and in thee, we in thee, and thou in us, our Saviour and our God. Amen.

LIX.

Though the people did not understand our Lord's meaning, when He said unto them, "The bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world," they yet believed that He spoke of some unknown good which He was able and willing to give them.

JOHN VI. 34. "*Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.*"

Whatever it was, they believed that it was a good gift, and they desired to have it.

Verse 35. "*And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*"

In plain and simple words Jesus declares himself to be *the bread of life*—that which can *satisfy the soul*. Nothing else can—no repentance—no good works—no self-sacrifice—not any one thing—nor every thing that man can do, can satisfy the longing need of the soul. And why? Because the sin that is, alas! in our very nature, mixes with every thing we do, and the nearer we draw to God, the more clearly we see, the more

deeply we feel, our want of holiness, and the sin that is in us ; so that, as has been said by a saint of old, ' our very repentance needs to be repented of.' Yet we feel that what is offered to the perfect and holy God must be perfect and holy, or it cannot be accepted by him, for it cannot be worthy of him. Therefore it is, that *nothing but Christ* can satisfy the need of the soul. He offers himself to us, pure, sinless, having all the perfection of holiness which we know must be, but which cannot be from us ; and he invites us to trust in him, as one whom God his Father has given to take our sins upon himself, to give to us his righteousness, and to appear for us—in our stead—not only as one who pleads for us, but as one who has paid the debt we owe ; and this is what is meant when Christ is called our Advocate and our Redeemer.*

Jesus knew that He had all to give that was needful, and therefore He said, " He that cometh to me shall never hunger ; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst : " these words mean, ' he shall not again be tormented with that unsatisfied longing for something he can depend upon to save him, which is like hunger and thirst to the soul—for in me he will find all he wants.'

Many of those who stood around Jesus, and had seen his most wonderful works, believed not. This He had known from the beginning, and He added :—

JOHN vi. 36. " *But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not.*"

It is no light thing to believe,—to be able to do so is the most precious gift of God—and all who so believe, are given by God to his Son, and by him are saved.

Verses 37—40. " *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me (said the Lord Jesus) ; and him that cometh to*

* 1 John ii. 1, 2. Rom. iii. 24.

me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which He hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life : and I will raise him up at the last day."

How beautiful is the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ ! How different his plan of salvation from the plans of men ! Whether among the men of old times or the men of our present day, it seems to belong to our nature to invent difficulties for ourselves. How shall I come ? says one. If you knew yourself to be in some great danger, if your house was on fire, and men shouted to you that there was a way of escape open before you, would you stay to ask questions ? would you not spring into that way and be safe ?

How can it be that simply seeing that Christ is the Son of God, and believing on him, shall save my soul ? says another. Here is the answer : to see him is to love him, to love him is to seek to please him. Is it possible that this can be otherwise ! O if we would bring to religion even the same willingness to understand simple truths that we bring to the common things of life, how much better for us would it be ! In common life, who questions the power of love ? Who does not know and feel, that where we love we desire to please, and that there is an instinct in our hearts that makes us love when we are loved,—that makes us seek the presence of the beloved ?

We know and feel all this of human love ; why then do we doubt the power of that love which is of God, compared to which all human love is feeble as the star-light compared with the noon-day sun ? " Without faith it is impossible to please God ; " but we naturally trust where we know we are loved ;

why then are we so backward to trust God, who has in his Son given us such a proof of his love? Why so slow to take simply to our comfort the words of Christ, "This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."

We may fret our lives away in an endless round of hard duties and works, made for ourselves by ourselves; but there is no salvation but in the Father's plan, carried out by the Son. We may make ourselves *Pharisees*; but He alone can make us *Christians*.

JOHN vi. 41, 42. "*The Jews then murmured at him, because He said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that He saith, I came down from heaven?*"

The people were so set upon finding in the Lord Jesus an *earthly* leader, that even those who followed him had cared or thought little about the history of his birth. Had they inquired, they would have heard, no doubt, that though Mary's son, He was not the son of Joseph. They would have heard how his miraculous birth was made known by angels; and, had they searched the Scriptures, they would have found that all had taken place as the prophets had foretold. Their worldly hopes and wishes, their hard hearts set upon earthly things, made all this impossible to them.

Verses 43—47. "*Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father,*

cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."

Let us observe these words; Jesus does not say, "he that believeth on me *shall have*, but *hath already* everlasting life; and the reason is plain, for he that believes on him *is in* a state of life that shall have no end: belief is the *life* of the undying soul.

Verses 48—58. "*I am* (said Jesus) *that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever."*

How solemnly does our Lord declare, again and again, that *He himself is the life of the soul!* How solemnly does He again and again assure all who will listen and believe, that He is to the soul what food is to the body! He calls himself

Bread, He says that whosoever "eateth of this bread shall live for ever:" because it was by his death, a violent death, borne willingly by him for men, that He was to be to them eternal life. He said unto them, that the bread of which He spoke was his flesh, which He would soon "give for the life of the world."

Many even of his disciples could not understand his meaning. It could not have been plain to any one till it was made plain by his death upon the cross; till the meaning of his words was made more clear by the holy Sacrament of the Communion, in which the Lord Jesus took bread, and calling it his body broken for them; and wine, and calling it his blood shed for them,—bade them eat the one, and drink the other, in remembrance of him. Then men might see and understand *how* they might eat his flesh and drink his blood, and live for ever. Then might they feel and know *how* they might so receive the crucified Saviour as to live by him, even as He, the Son, lives by the Father, in a true and abiding union with him.

Meanwhile they understood him not, and

JOHN vi. 60—65. *Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, He said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father."*

Do these words of our Lord bring a sickening fear, that perhaps it may not be given unto us to come unto him? Let the

fear depart, and let hope spring up in our hearts. Has not Jesus said, "No man can come unto me except the Father draw him," and is not the Father now drawing you? From whence is your anxiety, your fear that you are not coming to Jesus? Is it not, must it not be, that He is drawing you to himself? If it were not so, you would have no anxiety on the matter; you would be still careless whether you belonged to Christ or not; you would be as unconcerned as the rest of the world; for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him." (1 Cor. ii. 14.) Therefore this very fear, this anxiety, is a sign for good. Go on in hope, "seek, and ye shall find: ask, and it shall be given you, for *every one* that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth." (Matt. vii.) You know these are the words of our Lord; should you doubt them? Has He not, from the strong love in our own hearts, brought a reason why we should never doubt his willingness to draw us to himself by his Holy Spirit? Has He not said, "If ye then who are evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke ii. 13)

LX.

This discourse, in which Jesus offered himself to the people as "the bread of life," that had come down from heaven to give back to the sons of men the spiritual life which had been lost by Adam's sin, was spoken in the synagogue in Capernaum. It is written:—

Verse 59. "*These things said He in the synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum.*"

But his words perplexed those who heard him: they could

not understand *how* He was to "give his flesh for the life of the world."

Verses 60—62. "*Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before.*"

Does it seem impossible to believe that I am that bread, that food and strength which is needed for the souls of men, and that I came down from heaven? The time will soon be here when I shall rise up again into heaven, and some of you with your eyes shall see it.

Verses 63—65. "*It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And He said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.*"

Jesus knew, from the first, who, among the crowds of people that followed him from place to place, cared to listen to him, to be taught by him—and who followed him only from curiosity.

He also knew which of them were his enemies, and who it was that in the end should give him up or betray him into the hands of those who longed to shed his blood. Those who listened to him with an earnest wish to learn, would think over his words and would find the meaning of them. They would soon cease to find any difficulty in them; and would see *why* it was He called himself "the bread of life!" why it was He said, that his "flesh was meat indeed, and his blood was drink indeed." They would find that faith in him, would, by the

quickening Spirit of God, have power to nourish and strengthen their souls in a way that no bread, no meat, no wine, had ever yet nourished and strengthened their bodies.

To those who were not in earnest in their desire for heavenly teaching, the saying was hard—they could not receive it. Those who looked for an earthly prince in their Messiah were disgusted : and—

Verses 66—71. *“ From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, (apostles) Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the son of the living God. Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? * He spake of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon : for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.”*

It is very awful to think that one of the twelve, one of our Lord's own Apostles, who lived with him as his own familiar friends, should belong so completely to the Evil One, as to be called by Jesus “a devil.” We shall see, as the history of the life of Christ goes on, what it was that made Judas a hypocrite and a traitor. We shall see that he nursed in his secret heart the love of money, the desire of unlawful gain, and that his following Christ was but a cloak to hide the sin of avarice, or at least that his love of money was too strong for the love of Christ ever to fill his heart.

Oh let us think well of this ! These two things, the greedy desire of gain, and the desire to be a Christian, can never live together in the same heart. And let us remember that the searching eye that was upon Judas is still upon us—we cannot

* Olshausen gives the meaning of this, “ a slanderer of me, or a devil, that is, the Evil One amongst my disciples.”

deceive him—we may be accounted by men, as Judas was, one of the true disciples ; we may seem, as he did, to be stumbled by no hard saying in religion, and to keep close to Christ when others fall away ; and yet all the time the love of gain may possess our souls, and we may be traitors in our hearts. Let us take solemn heed to this ; for we may be sure our sin will find us out.

The second year of our Lord's ministry on earth, it is thought, was ended about this time. St. John, just before he tells of the miracle by which Jesus fed the multitude in the desert with the five barley-loaves and two small fishes, says, as if to mark the time—

JOHN vi. 4. “ *And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.*”

It is by the mention of these solemn feasts, which took place only once every year at a fixed season, that we are able at all to measure the time of our Lord's ministry on earth after his baptism in the river Jordan by John.

Let us, before we end this volume, fix in our minds the situation in which our blessed Lord is placed at the close of the second year of his ministry. He had now become known all over Judea and Galilee. The attention of the people had been every where fixed upon him. Their hopes and expectations had been raised to the highest pitch. Was He, or was He not, the long-looked for Messiah ? this was the question that filled men's minds. Now their hopes rose almost to certainty ; now they fell again to the earth, and rage as well as disappointment took possession of them.

When they saw his deeds, they were ready to take him by force, and make him a king : when they heard his words, they left him in disgust. And so it was that, at one moment, He seemed to rule the crowd ; at the next, He was forsaken by all but the few who felt the spiritual power of his teaching. *They*

clung to him for the very cause for which the others left him. The value of eternal life was beginning to be felt by them ; and, as this grew stronger and stronger within them, the desire for the honours of an earthly kingdom faded away.

This was a gradual work, and we shall find that very slowly were the hopes and wishes even of Christ's true disciples raised above the usual tone of other men's minds. But they *were raised*. The work was not left unfinished ; and, in the end they were enabled "to count all things but loss, so that they might win Christ and be found in him." Then they understood those words of his, "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father ; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me."

And so shall it be with each of us, if only we hold fast to that we do already know of Christ as the Son of God. Not all at once must we expect to understand the full glories of the Messiah's kingdom. Slowly the mists roll away, and often we have to wait long before we can see the Saviour in the full light of gospel truth. But we shall so see him, if amidst all the changes of other men's opinions, amidst all the doubts and misgivings of our own minds, we still hold fast by him. Many fall away ; but oh, let us be faithful still ! With Simon Peter, let us in every trial of our faith say, "Lord, to whom shall we go ? Thou hast the words of eternal life ; and we believe, and are sure, that thou art the Son of the living God."

Prayer.

Blessed be thy name, O eternal Lord, thou art the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. All things around us change ; but thou changest not. Thou art the life of our souls, and we have no hope but in thee. O give us grace to cling to thee, that as thou livest by the Father, so we may live by thee, and ever love thee more and more, as we understand thee better : give us power to serve thee with devoted hearts in sorrow and in joy.

Men's opinions change, but thou changest not. Thy words remain eternal life ; be this the anchor of our souls, that " we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God ; " so shall thy will be accomplished in us, that we may have everlasting life, and at the last day by thee be raised again. Amen, for ever and for ever. Amen.

END OF VOL. II.

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